This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

+ *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.

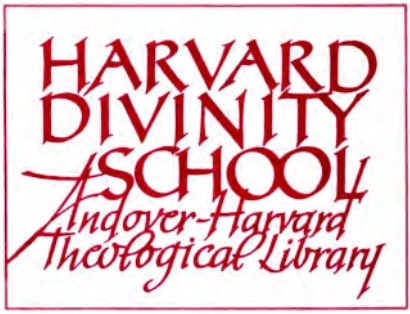
+ *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.

+ *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.

+ *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at `http://books.google.com/`


HARVARD
DIVINITY
SCHOOL
Andover-Harvard
Theological Library

CAUSES AND EVILS

OF

CONTENTIONS

UNVEILED IN

LETTERS TO CHRISTIANS.

BY NOAH WORCESTER.

DIVINITY SCHOOL
LIBRARY
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

BOSTON:
PUBLISHED BY GRAY & BOWEN.
1831.

BR
121
.W59
Copy. 2

ENTERED, according to Act of Congress, in the year 1831, by GRAY & BOWEN, in the Clerk's Office of the District Court of Massachusetts.

Peirce & Parker.....Printers.

2660
37:2

CONTENTS.

LETTER	I.	Introductory Observations,	5
"	II.	A Primary Ground of Alienation among Christians,	9
"	III.	The Truth as hated by the Wicked,	17
"	IV.	An Important Question answered,	22
"	V.	Two Examples of Error from the Ambiguity of Language,	33
"	VI.	The Messiah's censures of the Scribes and Pharisees,	41
"	VII.	Paul's censures of Schismatic Teachers,	46
"	VIII.	Paul's account of the Natural Man,	51
"	IX.	The Injunctions and Examples of Christ,	60
"	X.	Paul's Reasonings with Contending Christians,	69
"	XI.	The Apostle James on Censorious Judging,	73
"	XII.	False Standards occasion False Estimates,	77
"	XIII.	The Disregarded Parable,	86
"	XIV.	Example of the Four Evangelists,	91
"	XV.	Pernicious Effects of Censorious Judging,	95
"	XVI.	Vices Compared,	100
"	XVII.	The Gospel Remedy for Contention,	104
"	XVIII.	Conclusion,	114
		Postscript,	119

LETTERS TO CHRISTIANS.

LETTER I.

INTRODUCTORY OBSERVATIONS.

My Christian Brethren,

KNOWING that the time of his crucifixion was at hand, our Saviour took an opportunity to prepare the minds of his disciples for the event, by communicating such instructions as they were then able to bear, and such as he wished them to observe. It was in this discourse that he gave them his "New Commandment" which he repeated again and again "that ye love one another as I have loved you." He also said to them, "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples if ye have love one to another." He forewarned them of the trials which they would have to endure as his disciples, and promised to send to them the Comforter, which is the Holy Spirit. He not only assured them that they were beloved by himself, but also beloved by the Father At the close of the interview he poured forth the desires of his soul in fervent prayer to the Father,

not only for his apostles but for all that should become believers on him through the instrumentality of their preaching in his name. The following are important portions of his prayer. "Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also who shall believe on me through their word; that they all may be one as thou Father art in me and I in thee, that they may be one in us, that the world may know that thou hast sent me." John 17. 20, 21.

It is remarkable of what importance it seems to have been in his view that his apostles and all his disciples should love one another, and be one as he and the Father are one. But why this fervency for love and union among his disciples? The reason is assigned in the following words—"THAT THE WORLD MAY BELIEVE THAT THOU HAST SENT ME."

To believe that the Father sent him was to believe that he was not an impostor, but the promised Messiah, whom God had sent to be the Light and the Saviour of the world.

The words of Christ very clearly import that in his view the progress of the gospel and the conversion of the world to the Christian faith, greatly depended on the mutual love and union of those who believe in him; that such love and union are adapted to bring others to believe in him, as the way, the truth, and the life. When Christians thus walk in love they exhibit the true spirit of Christ and his gospel, excite attention and inquiry, command esteem, and produce conviction of the reality and usefulness of the Christian religion. The spirit

of Christ then appears to great advantage in contrast with the spirit of party and of the world.

Another truth of awful import is implied in this prayer of Christ, which is, that alienation and discord among professed believers in Christ, tend to prevent the conversion of others, and to promote infidelity. If the oneness of Christians, or their mutual love tends to multiply conversions, to the Christian faith, discord and alienation must have the contrary tendency.

May it not then be a solemn truth that the party strifes and contentions among professed believers in Christ, have been the principal reasons why the world ere this day has not been filled with the benign influence of the Gospel—why so great a part of the world is yet enveloped in pagan darkness, and why Deism, and even Atheism still show their heads in Christian lands? How awful and affecting is the thought that the dying prayer of our Lord has had so little influence on the minds of his avowed friends, and that their anti-christian conduct has been the means of preventing the progress of the Gospel and the salvation of their fellow men! What real friend of Christ with his prayer in view, can reflect on the ecclesiastical history of Christendom, or observe the contentions among Christians at the present day, without feeling shocked, grieved and ashamed? Surely if mutual love, or union among Christians be an appointed means for the spread of the Gospel, and the conversion of the world, it behooves Christians

seriously to inquire what each has to do that the stumbling block may be removed. It is not to be supposed that the evil is limited to any one or two denominations—nor that the evil can be removed by mutual sectarian reproaches as a substitute for mutual love. If the people of each sect will impartially examine at home, and correct what may be found amiss, they will perhaps find enough to do in the work of self-reformation, and in cultivating that humility of heart without which mutual love can never exist among Christians.

All well informed Christians must acknowledge that the conversion of the world to the Christian faith, is a desirable event, and one which has long been predicted. If the fulfilment of the prophecy has been prevented or retarded by the want of mutual love among Christians, or by the existence of a contrary spirit, this state of things must have resulted from causes which should be sought out and set aside. It is possible that much of the evil has resulted from the adoption of some erroneous principle or principles, which for want of due examination may have seemed to justify schism and alienation.

No intelligent Christian will dare to say that the prayer of the Messiah, that his disciples might be one was foolish or unreasonable. If then it shall be found that a principle has been extensively adopted which tends to defeat the object of this prayer, or which is incompatible with the oneness for which Christ prayed, we may pretty safely infer

that the principle is false and delusive. Or if certain passages of Scripture have been so interpreted as to favor such a principle, we may infer that the interpretations are erroneous. To show that such a principle and such interpretations have been adopted will be the object of succeeding Letters; and in doing this I hope to unveil the root of bitterness and show its deleterious nature.

LETTER II.

A PRIMARY GROUND OF ALIENATION AMONG CHRISTIANS.

My Christian Brethren,

For a long time it has been with me an object to ascertain the principle which has for ages been the occasion of alienation and bitterness among Christians. It is not however to be supposed that the whole of the evil is to be ascribed to any one principle or cause; but, on mature reflection it is my belief, that a large portion of the mischief is to be ascribed to the following hypothesis,—*That error of opinion on religious subjects proceeds from wickedness of heart.*

I have not been able to find any other hypothesis

or principle which so naturally accounts for the alienation and hostilities which are so common between men of different opinions; and this principle has often been avowed by persons of different sects. On what other principle can I feel alienation from a brother whose opinions happen to be different from mine, as to the meaning of a text of Scripture? As every man necessarily regards his own opinions as correct, if I have adopted the principle that error proceeds from depravity, I shall naturally impute blame to every man who dissents from me. But if I have not adopted this principle, and have candor enough to account for the supposed error of my brother on excusable grounds, I see no cause at all for alienation or censure. If in addition to this candor, I possess humility and self-knowledge enough to believe, that it is very possible the error in the case, may be on my own part, this will surely make me very cautious in regard to imputing the difference of opinion to my brother's depravity.

As it is my intention to examine the subject impartially, I shall here admit, that wickedness of heart is one of many occasions of error on religious subjects. In some cases it may be the principal cause; but in others it may have no influence at all.

The hypothesis that error always proceeds from wickedness of heart, considered as a principle of conduct among Christians, appears to me of the most pernicious tendency, and to have as fair a claim to be regarded as the fruit of a wicked heart, as any

doctrine by which any denomination of Christians has been known. What I have now advanced respecting it I shall aim to illustrate by various facts and considerations.

1. If the principle is just and may be safely acted upon, it is a weapon which may be wielded by each sect against all others. For conscientious men of every sect must regard every thing as error which contradicts their own real opinions. Each must therefore think that if any one has a right to apply the principle, it must be so with himself. His opponent may think the same. Hence a scene of mutual accusation and reproach will naturally result. But who can conceive of a more anti-christian state of society, than this principle would produce, if universally adopted and reduced to practice?

2. The principle encourages the indulgence of a temper the reverse of that which is inculcated by the Gospel. "Let each esteem others better than himself"—Charity or love "thinketh no evil—hopeth all things"—"worketh no ill to its neighbor." How different the feelings indulged by him who imputes the supposed errors of dissenting brethren to the wickedness of their hearts. He will of course think himself better than others—think evil of them, hope little or nothing; and what he calls love will work evil to his neighbor, and dispose him to defame and revile. The more his mind is imbued with this principle, the more he will trust in himself that he is righteous and despise others.

Every man who has sense enough to know that the opinions of others differ from his, may also know that his opinions differ from theirs. How then are we to account for the fact, that of the many who ascribe error to the depravity of heart, so few of them are seen to suspect that their own opinions proceed from this corrupt source? Does not this single fact evince a great want of self-knowledge and humility, too great a propensity to look abroad for faults, and too little desire to cleanse first that which is within?

3. From the preceding remarks it would be very natural to suspect, that the censorious principle has been much more frequently adopted by men who were themselves in gross errors, than by those who delight in the truth. It may therefore be proper to look into history and inquire, who have been the men most forward to act on this principle?

If we go back to the time of the Messiah's ministry, we shall find that the principle was applied to him, and that on this ground he was accused, arraigned, and crucified. He dissented from the pharisees as to what was lawful to be done on the Sabbath; on which ground they said, "We *know that this man is a sinner.*" He claimed to be "the Son of God;" this they pronounced to be blasphemy, and deserving of death. On which part was the error in these cases?

Who was in error when Paul thought he "ought to do many things contrary to Jesus of Nazareth?" or when the apostles were persecuted as men who

turned the world upside down? Who was in the wrong when papists persecuted the protestants? Or when the English hierarchy caused our ancestors to emigrate to this country? In all these cases the persecutors acted on the principle that error proceeds from wickedness of heart. Indeed this is the fundamental principle of all persecution.

Should it be asked, who were in the wrong when protestants persecuted papists? I answer, the *protestants.* The papists might be in error respecting the questions in dispute; but in persecuting them for their opinions, the protestants acted on the worst error of popery. It has been so in all the forms of persecution which protestants of different sects have carried on against each other. In how many instances have honest and peaceable men been persecuted because they refused to engage in the works of war and military murder! Or because they were unwilling to engage in sectarian strife!

4. Every man deems the principle in question unjust, when acted upon towards himself. Even the men who are most forward to impute error to wickedness of heart, are very sure to raise the cry of persecution when others apply the principle to themselves. This is surely a circumstance which deserves attention. For it is similar to what uniformly occurs in the sanguinary wars of nations. On each side the partizans practise and justify revenge in their own soldiers, but condemn the same thing as *murder* when practised by the opposing party.

5. It will probably be neither denied nor doubted that the papal Inquisition was founded on the principle that error of opinion proceeds from wickedness of heart; nor that the myriads of victims which have been murdered by these terrific tribunals, were put to death on the same principle. Should it be said that this has been an *abuse* of the principle; I may ask, when has the principle ever been applied but in acts of abuse or injustice?

6. This principle when associated with party spirit has often so bewildered the minds of men, that they have thought they were pleasing God by the most flagrant violations of his law, and by the most atrocious acts of injustice towards fellow men. By such delusions men were led to fulfil our Lord's prediction, "The time will come when he that killeth you will think he doeth God service." Under such a malignant influence men can seldom see any thing good in the objects of their censure; for they are prepared to impute the most benevolent and self-denying acts to wicked motives, or a diabolical agency; and if reproved for their censoriousness they can exclaim, "Thou wast altogether born in sin, and dost thou teach us?" Though this exclamation may seldom be expressed in these words, it may be intelligibly expressed by contemptuous smiles insinuations and gestures.

7. Were it a revealed and unquestionable truth, that error always proceeds from depravity of heart, still no uninspired person could safely act on the principle in his treatment of Christian brethren.

For when a disagreement of opinion occurs between brethren as to the meaning of a text of Scripture; who that is not inspired, can certainly know that the error is not on his own part? In such a case, humility, benevolence, and a consciousness of liability to err, would naturally restrain the meek and lowly from wielding the weapon of censure against his brother's heart; yet the self-sufficient Pharisee would not hesitate practically to say to his dissenting brother, "Stand by thyself, for I am holier than thou;" it is owing to the wickedness of your heart that you do not see with me. Be as humble as I am, and you will think as I do.

Is it not then, a clear case that this principle is far less likely to be resorted to by the righteous, than by the wicked? When this weapon falls into the hands of party spirit, it will assuredly be employed for party purposes, and those who wield it, will be pretty sure to call evil good and good evil, to put darkness for light and light for darkness. What is evil in themselves, they will call good; and what is good in others, they will call evil. It was obviously so, with the persecutors of our Lord. While they appear to have had no concern, lest the error should be found on their own part, his benevolent acts were viewed by them as acts of wickedness, and deserving of death. "For a good work we stone thee not," was their plea, and such is generally the plea of persecutors and revilers in every age and country. What person was ever persecuted on the accusation that he was a good man?

There are many opinions avowed by persons of different sects at the present day, which appear to me very erroneous; but seldom have I heard an opinion avowed, that I could not account for, otherwise, than by imputing it to depravity of heart. When I reflect how contrary it must be to the nature of humility and benevolence to impute a brother's opinions to his wickedness, while there is nothing else in his character to lead to such a conclusion, I am often amazed to hear the principle avowed by men who in other respects appear to be good people.

Excepting the principles which justify deciding political disputes by national hostilities, I know not another, which I think has done a tenth part so much mischief, as that which imputes error on religious subjects to wickedness of heart. If the nature of a tree is to be known by its fruits, or the nature of a principle by its practical results, the censorious principle now under review, may well be denominated the Bohon Upas of the Christian world. It is a tree which has extended its branches and its poisonous influence over every Christian country, changing the milk of brotherly kindness into the bitter waters of hatred and censure, and causing contention, calumny and persecution to reign triumphant, where nothing should have been known but peace and love, with their genuine fruits.

LETTER III.

THE TRUTH AS HATED BY THE WICKED.

My Christian Brethren,

THE word truth frequently occurs in the Bible, and also in controversial writings. It has been common to represent that the hearts of sinners are naturally opposed to the truth, and to account for supposed error of opinion by ascribing it to hatred of the truth. Uncharitable Christians of different sects, have too frequently reproached each other as enemies to the truth, and on this ground each, perhaps, has accounted for what he believed to be error in the other.

As the term truth is used in the Bible, it has several significations. When used in relation to facts, it is the opposite to falsehood—in relation to opinion, it is the opposite to error—in relation to promises, it is the opposite to unfaithfulness—in relation to commands, it is the opposite to partiality or injustice—in relation to moral character, it is the opposite to unrighteousness, and is of the same import as uprightness or moral rectitude. "God is true;" and in the same sense that "God is light;" and "God is *love*," it may be said "God is *truth*." He is the source and fountain of truth in all its forms or significations. As his benevolence and righteousness are expressed in the law, and in the Gospel, these are called the truth. Jesus came "to

bear witness of the truth; and he said of himself, "I am the way, the truth, and the life." To delight in goodness or in doing good, is to delight in the truth. To walk in obedience to the law of love and to do what is right, is to walk in the truth.

There are truths innumerable and of various classes. Every art or science has its system of truths. In the Bible we have historical and geographical truths, as well as those of a moral or religious nature. Whatever is right or true, is the truth.

In what sense of the word then, may it be said that the sinner is opposed to the truth? Would it not be in vain to try to convince him that his heart is opposed to such truths as the following:—Eight and two are ten—Paris is the capital of France—Alfred was once the king of England? Should we succeed better in attempting to convince him that he hates the following Scriptural truths. "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth"—Jesus was born in Bethlehem—he was crucified on Calvary—God raised him from the dead—God so loved the world that he sent his Son that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. It is possible that an Atheist or a Deist might become convinced that he had hated these truths; but it is believed that no person who had grown up in the belief that the Bible is of divine authority could be convinced that he ever hated such truths, any more than that he hated the truth which affirmed his own existence.

When by truth, is meant the righteous requirements and prohibitions of God, it may with propriety be said that the habitual transgressor hates the truth; and it may not be in vain to try to convince him of this fact. Men are of course opposed to whatever opposes their governing propensity. The covetous worldling is opposed to the command, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." The revengeful man is opposed to the precept, "Love your enemies." The drunkard is opposed to the laws of temperance, and the delaying sinner is opposed to the command "Repent"—"Cease to do evil, and learn to do well."

The just requirements of a benevolent earthly parent, are the truth, in the same sense that God's law is the truth. They prescribe what is right for the son to do. The disobedient son, whose heart is devoted to gambling and dissipation, hates his father's commands and prohibitions; and in so doing, he hates the truth. But it does not hence follow, that he hates the truths which affirm the existence of his father, and that his father is a good man, who is ready to forgive him as soon as he shall repent.

Preceptive truth is a rule of duty. Historical and doctrinal truths, furnish motives to obedience. While men are under the dominion of unbridled passions, they may be said to hate the law of truth, which requires of them self-denial, and the devotion of their hearts and their all to God. From the same influence they may disregard the divine threatenings and make "light" of the offer of pardon and salvation. While they delight in the ways of

sin, they love darkness rather than light, and will not come to the light, lest their deeds should be reproved. Their ardor to gratify their lusts, disposes them to turn a deaf ear both to the requirements of God, and the motives to obedience. But there are a multitude of important truths contained in the Bible, to which the sinner is no more opposed than he is to the whole system of mathematical truth.

In two senses of the word the unbelieving Jews rejected the *truth*, during the Messiah's ministry, and that of his apostles.

I. They rejected the truth by which Jesus was proclaimed as the Son of God, the promised Messiah, and Saviour of the world.

II. They rejected the truth by which he declared the righteousness required by God for the remission of sins.

The truth in the first sense was proclaimed by an audible voice from heaven at his baptism, and also at his transfiguration, and by the innumerable miracles which he wrought in his Father's name. The truth in the second sense, was declared by his preaching and his example.

They rejected him as the Messiah, because they had expected a temporal Prince to deliver them from their subjection to the Romans, and not a spiritual Prince to deliver them from their thraldom of sin. Had Jesus appeared in the character which their prepossessions had given to the Messiah, but few miracles would have been necessary to induce them to flock to his standard by thousands. But when in-

stead of a splendid military chieftain, to call them to arms and war, they perceived a spiritual Teacher, calling them to repentance, peace, and a life of self-denial, they despised and rejected him, notwithstanding his thousands of beneficent miracles.

As they rejected him in the character of the Messiah, so they rejected the heavenly messages of truth and peace proclaimed by his ministry. Had they been of a candid and obedient heart, they would soon have perceived that he came not in his own name, but in the name of the Father that sent him. But being of a perverse and disobedient temper, they rejected the light and truth of his precepts, and hated him because he testified of them, that their deeds were evil. Hence the following passages in his preaching:—

"He that believeth on him, is not condemned; but he that believeth not, is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation that light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil, hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. But he that doeth truth, cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest that they are wrought in God." John iii. 18—21. "My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me. If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself." John vii. 16, 17. "If God were your Father, ye

would love me, for I proceeded forth and came from God; neither came I of myself, but he sent me. Why do ye not understand my speech? even because ye cannot hear my words." John viii. 4, 2. The last clause is translated by Dr. Campbell—"It is because ye cannot *bear* my doctrine."

It may be true that the ambiguity of some of the predictions respecting the Messiah, led the Jews to expect a temporal Prince, but the obstinacy with which they adhered to that opinion in opposition to all the light resulting from his miracles and his ministry, may justly be imputed to the wickedness of their hearts. Nor can it be doubted that other faithful teachers, and their preaching, have been rejected in a similar manner. Still it may not be true, that all error of opinion concerning religious truth results from depravity of heart.

LETTER IV.

AN IMPORTANT QUESTION ANSWERED.

My Christian Brethren,

It being granted that our Lord imputed the error of the unbelieving Jews respecting himself, to a disobedient heart, why may not ministers of

the Gospel of the present age, impute all supposed errors on important doctrines to the same source?

This is a question which should interest all inquirers after truth—all who wish the peace and prosperity of Zion. I shall endeavor to give such answers as will commend themselves to every impartial mind.

1. God gave to his Son the Holy Spirit not by measure—by which he could infallibly distinguish between truth and error; and by which he so knew what was in man, that he could tell the motives by which they were governed, and the reasons which operated in the adoption of their opinions. This cannot be said of the ministers of the Gospel at the present day.

2. Jesus Christ was ordained of God to be the Judge of the living as well as of the dead. It is not so with the ordinary ministers of the Gospel.

3. Ministers of the Gospel are not only liable themselves to error; but they are greatly divided in their opinions. If any one of them has a right to impute the errors of his brethren to moral depravity, why is not this right common to all? If not common to all, who but an inspired teacher shall be able to say to whom the right belongs, and to whom it does not? If all have the right, it is then certain that some must have a right to judge unjustly and injuriously. Because where there is opposition of opinions there must be error on one side or the other, if not on both.

4. Ministers of the Gospel, as well as other men are very liable to be under the influence of party

passions, and to be governed by such influence in estimating both the opinions and the characters of those who dissent from them. The annals of past ages furnish melancholy proof of this fact—such evidence as might well make any considerate man tremble at the thought of assuming such a power or right.

Besides, in civil cases, an *interested* person is deemed unqualified to act as a judge or a juror. So also is the man who is known to be prejudiced against a person or party whose cause is to be decided. How imminent then must be the danger, when after long controversy and excitement, a minister of one sect ventures to assume the office of a judge in respect to the hearts of those who dissent from his creed! Under such circumstances, what reflecting man would dare, unauthorized, to assume such responsibility? How little confidence is to be placed in the censorious opinions mutually expressed of each other by political partizans, in a time of great excitement? Quite as little, I suspect, is to be placed in the opinions of religious partizans under similar circumstances.

5. There are many causes of error, and many ways to account for it, besides the wickedness of the human heart; and it is a law of love, and the nature of true love, to put the most favorable construction upon a brother's conduct which the circumstances of the case will admit. Every man duly aware of his own liability to err, must feel it to be desirable that others should act on this principle towards

himself. The ambiguity of language is a source of error, by which every man is liable to be led astray, whether he be learned or illiterate, good or bad. Many ambiguous words and phrases are used in the Bible, and in some instances it must be doubtful perhaps to every one in which of two or more senses these words or phrases are used in particular passages. The man who is not aware of his own liability to mistake the intended meaning of an ambiguous word or phrase, and thus to form an erroneous opinion, is as little to be envied for his intelligence as for his candor.

That good men are liable to mistake when ambiguous words are used by inspired teachers, may be evident from what occurred during our Lord's ministry. Several instances are recorded of the mistakes of his apostles, which arose from this source. When he exhorted them to beware of the "*leaven* of the Pharisees;" they supposed it to be the "leaven of bread" that he meant, till by reasoning with them Christ led them to understand that it was the doctrine of the Pharisees which he had called "leaven." Thousands of similar mistakes result from such a figurative use of common words. The apostles again mistook the meaning of Christ, when he said to them "our friend Lazarus sleepeth." The evening before the crucifixion, Christ said to Judas, "What thou doest, do quickly." Now no man at the table knew for what purpose Jesus thus addressed the traitor; but as it was known to them that Judas kept the purse of the company, some supposed

that Jesus had directed him to purchase the things that would be needed at the feast, or to give something to the poor. After the resurrection, the apostles again misapprehended the meaning of their Lord in the answer he gave to Peter's question relating to John. Jesus replied to Peter, by another question—"If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? From this ambiguous answer, the opinion was formed and circulated that John should not die.

Now what should we have thought of our Lord's character, had he imputed such mistakes as have been mentioned, to wickedness of heart in his disciples? Yet this would have been as proper as it is for Christians at this day, thus to account for their differences of opinion. For a great part of these differences result from the ambiguity of Scripture language.

6. Children of different sects are differently taught as to the meaning of particular words and phrases, as they occur in the Scriptures; and many of them are perhaps to the end of their lives incapable of correcting the errors thus imbibed in childhood. Though in discoursing with the Jews, Christ imputed their rejection of his testimony to a disobedient heart; yet it is not to be supposed that what he said to them, was applicable to *all* the Jews of that age who did not become believers in him—nor to any who had not an opportunity to be correctly informed of the evidences of his divine mission. Many of the people of Judea, as well as Jews in foreign lands, had probably no knowledge of Jesus, of his preach-

ing, or his miracles, but what they received from his enemies. In regard to persons thus situated, it can hardly be said that light had come into the world; and it cannot be supposed that they were held accountable for privileges bestowed on others, which were denied to them by the course of divine providence. When children are brought up under the influence of pious parents, who happen to entertain erroneous doctrines, they are under a kind of necessity of imbibing erroneous opinions. For a child to be thus situated may be a calamity, but not a crime; and it is rather an evidence of an obedient than a disobedient heart, that he imbibes the erroneous opinions of his parents. For he is required to honor father and mother, and a disposition to obey this command, will naturally incline him to listen to parental instruction and to receive as truth what his parents inculcate as the doctrines of the Gospel. It is as unreasonable as it is cruel for a Protestant to impute it to wickedness of heart that the children of Papists grow up strongly attached to the doctrines of the Catholic church. We may as rationally blame a child for not having been born omniscient, or for possessing the spirit of filial love and reverence, as to blame him for receiving as truth the erroneous opinions which were inculcated on him by his parents, while it was impossible for him to know that they were incorrect. Let any censorious minister ask himself, what would be his views of others, who should impute it to wickedness of heart, that his children hearken to his instructions, and grow up in

the belief of his religious opinions? To whatever denomination a child may belong, the more pious and humble he is, the more likely he is to imbibe the religious opinions of his parents, whether they be correct or erroneous.

7. The doctrines about which Christians have contended, have seldom been strictly the doctrines of the Gospel; they have more commonly been the doctrines of men—of men who assumed the right to say in other words what was meant by the inspired writers, and to set up their explanations of Scripture as unquestionable truth. In some instances, indeed there have been disputes about the genuineness of certain passages, which have found a place in the Bible. In other instances there have been disputes in regard to the correctness of the commonly received translations. But I have not learned that any sect of Christians has been formed on either of these grounds of dispute. The disputes which have divided Christians into sects, have originated in differences of opinion about the meaning of particular passages of Scripture, which were acknowledged to be genuine by each party,—and to be true in the sense intended by the inspired writers. To express the supposed sense of the passages more definitely, has been an object with those who have formed creeds or confessions of faith. Propositions which men have thus formed have been set up as standards of faith, and as tests of Christian character; and to these others must give their assent, or be denied Christian privileges. These propositions of

human manufacture are what their advocates denominate *the truth as it is in Jesus*. Those who refuse their assent to these dogmas are reproached as enemies to the truth, while they freely admit as the truth the very texts of Scripture, on which these articles are supposed to be founded. It seems to have been thought not sufficient for a man to believe the doctrines of the Gospel as given by the wisdom of God, but he must assent to an edition of these doctrines as *revised* and *amended*, by the wisdom of self-sufficient men. The "bones of contention" have not been the words of God's wisdom, but the words of man's wisdom: and these words of man's wisdom have been preferred to the words of God, as standards of truth and tests of character. I think I do not go too far in saying that these human compositions have been *preferred* to the Bible, for the purposes I have mentioned. If they are not PREFERRED, why are they urged, and substituted, as if the Bible were insufficient? I am aware that those who adopt this course profess great respect for the Bible, and are not commonly backward to accuse dissenters from their creed with disrespect for the oracles of God. But it seems to me an extraordinary mode of evincing a regard for the Bible, to substitute for it, as a rule of faith, the compositions of fallible and uninspired men.

If one sect of Christians may adopt this course, so may another; and thus it has been that different sects have adopted the same self-sufficient principle, and mutually censured, reproached and persecuted one an-

other. Then a third sect is formed, which condemns each of the preceding; then a fourth, and a fifth, and so on till the family of professed disciples of Christ have become divided and subdivided into numerous parties or hostile bands, as unlike a "building fitly framed together," as are the fragments of a temple after having been rent asunder and dispersed by the violence of a hurricane,—and almost as far from that oneness which Christ prayed might exist among all who should become believers in him, as are the different parties of the belligerent troops of a nation in a time of civil war. What can be more adapted to promote infidelity than such perpetual hostilities among those who profess to be disciples of the Prince of peace, and to love one another as Christ has loved them!

What is the difference between denying the Gospel to be a sufficient revelation, and establishing the creed of a particular sect as a standard of faith and a test of character? If the Gospel is not so clear and definite as to supersede the necessity of human creeds as standards of faith, why should it be called a revelation from God? Suppose I should form a confession of faith, expressive of my own views of the meaning of Scripture. This might be useful for giving information of what I think to be true in regard to the doctrines of the Gospel. If I stop here, I give no just cause of offence. But if I proceed further and make my opinions a test of character, and impute it to moral depravity that others dissent from my creed, what do I less than to

act the part of the "Man of sin," assuming to be "as God" or "above all that is called God"—invading the rights of my fellow men, and arrogating the prerogative of God in judging the hearts of my brethren? There is, I suspect, much more of the "Man of sin," in this business of creedmaking and censuring such as dissent, than has generally been imagined. If it be said that by the "Man of sin" the Pope was intended; I would ask, who and what is a Pope but a man who assumes the right of determining how his brethren should understand the doctrines of the Gospel, and the right of censuring and persecuting such men as dare to question his infallibility? The Pontiff of Rome is not the only man who presumes thus to invade the rights of men and the rights of God.

Party creeds, in the language of human wisdom, have unquestionably been adopted in the belief, that the doctrines of the Gospel can be better expressed than they were by Christ and his apostles—at least, expressed in language less ambiguous, and more sure to keep heretical persons from joining a church. It has been pleaded that creeds or articles of faith, expressed in Scripture language, would afford no security against the admission of persons of very different opinions, as all who profess to regard the Bible as their rule of faith will readily assent to articles thus expressed. Hence it has been deemed proper to express articles of faith in language more definite than the language of the Scriptures, that there may be more uniformity of opinion among

the members of the same church, and that men of erroneous opinions may be excluded.

But do such articles of faith insure uniformity of opinion? Look at the Church of England, whose clergy subscribe "The Thirty Nine Articles." The majority of them are supposed to be Arminians, and being the *majority*, they are called "*the Orthodox.*" Another large and respectable class of these clergymen are Calvinists. Some are supposed to be Antinomians. They all subscribe a creed which is in the strongest language Trinitarian; yet how many of the clergy of that church have been Unitarians, except in name! And how many of the explanations of the doctrine of "three persons in one God," given by the ministers of that church, have amounted to nothing more than Unitarianism under a Trinitarian cloak or veil! What better than this have we when we are told, that by the three persons in one God are meant *three attributes*, or *three offices*, or *three relations*, or *three* unknown *distinctions?* Is it not a fact, too, that many of the clergy of the Church of England subscribe the Thirty Nine Articles, not in reality as articles of their belief, but as "Articles of peace?"

In that Church we have an example illustrative of the benefits or the disadvantages which result from the establishment of Articles of faith in the words of man's wisdom. In our own country, too, something of the same diversity of opinion is known to exist among ministers who profess an assent to popular articles of faith, which are called essential doc-

trines; and the same articles are also in our country differently explained by different writers. What worse than this might be expected to result should all their articles of faith be stated in the very words of Christ and his Apostles? And would there be no advantage in having the articles so expressed as to preclude the strong temptations to hypocrisy and dissimulation?

LETTER V.

TWO EXAMPLES OF ERROR FROM THE AMBIGUITY OF LANGUAGE.

My Christian Brethren,

HAVING mentioned the ambiguity of language as a prolific source of error and diversity of opinion among Christians, I shall now present two examples.

When our Lord instituted the supper as a memorial of his death, on giving the bread to his disciples he said, "Take, eat, this is my body;" and on giving the cup he said, "This is my blood." On such ground as this the Catholic clergy formed the doctrine of transubstantiation. In other words they formed propositions to be received as articles of faith which affirmed that the bread and the wine,

as used in the Lord's Supper, are changed into the body and blood of Christ,—so that those who partake of the supper, eat the flesh and drink the blood of the Lord Jesus. This doctrine has been deemed by the Catholics not only as true, but so essential that those who deny it are deemed guilty of damnable error or heresy, and on this ground thousands of Protestants have been subjected to imprisonment torture and death, as heretics.

Protestants as well as Papists admit that Christ uttered the words which have been quoted; and they believe them to be both true and important in the sense they were used by our Lord. There has been a difference of opinion between Lutherans and other Protestants as to the import of the words, as used by Christ. The most common opinion among Protestants of the present day is probably this, that the words are to be understood in a figurative sense, meaning that the bread and the wine in the Lord's Supper, are to be regarded as *symbols* of the body and blood of Christ.

Another example may be the following:

In foretelling his death, Jesus said—"I lay down my life for the sheep." His Apostles represent that "while we were yet sinners Christ died for us"—that "he suffered for sins, the just for the unjust"—that "he died for all," and "tasted death for every man." A large portion of the Christian world have understood these and similar passages as importing that Christ suffered as a substitute for sinners—endured for them a vicarious punishment—the wrath of God

—the full penalty of the law, or an equivalent to the "punishment due to us all"—at least "all the elect."

The doctrine of vicarious punishment, like that of transubstantiation, has been declared to be an essential doctrine, and those who dissent from it have been denounced as heretics, enemies of Christ, despisers of the truth, and unworthy of the name of Christians.

Yet as it was in the other case, those Christians who dissent from the doctrine of vicarious punishment, readily admit all that the Bible says of the sufferings and death of Christ; they believe that he laid down his life for his sheep, that he gave his life a ransom for sinners, and "died for all"—"the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God." They believe too, that in his death, his love and the love of God for our sinful race, were really and wonderfully displayed. And that we are reconciled to God by the death of his Son. All these ideas they believe to be as true as they would have been had Christ suffered a vicarious punishment—but not true in the sense which has been supposed by the advocates for that doctrine.

Now let it be observed that in both examples the words relied on are ambiguous; for there is more than one sense in which they are capable of being understood. As a *portrait* or *image* is called by the name of the person represented, so the bread and wine may be called the body and blood of Christ, which are represented by them; and it is well known

that there are several senses in which one person may die for another, or for many others.

Let it also be observed that in the first example, Christ did *not* say, This bread is *changed* into my body—nor, This wine is *changed* into my blood Not a syllable was said by him about any change or transubstantiation. This idea was *added* to the words of Christ by the framers of the doctrine. So in the second example, Christ did *not* say I lay down my life as a *vicarious punishment* for my sheep. Nor did his Apostles in any instance say, that Christ endured for us "the wrath of God," or the penalty of the divine law due to our offences. This idea was *added* by the framers of the doctrine of vicarious punishment, just as the idea of *change* was added by the framers of the doctrine of transubstantiation. I have no doubt that in each case the framers thought the idea they added to be implied in the words of Scripture; but this is no proof that it was implied, nor that any man had a right to insert it, as the word of God. It is, however, by thus adding to the words of Scripture what men have supposed to be implied, that numerous propositions have been formed as essential articles of faith. Nor has the mischief of this creed-making policy stopped here. Each sect, after having thus formed its essential articles, have called them *the truth*. Hence, with them to love the truth, is to love the articles of their creed, formed in the words of man's wisdom; and any one who dissents from these articles, is supposed to be a despiser of the truth, an opposer of the truth, an enemy

to the God of truth. Of course, the opposition to these supposed truths, is imputed to depravity of heart. Hence persecution in various forms, has been practised by one sect of Christians against another. What an awful responsibility does a fallible uninspired man take on himself, when he ventures to substitute his own opinion of an ambiguous passage of Scripture for the word of God, and to make that opinion a test by which he may judge the hearts of others!

That ministers of the gospel have a right to explain the Scriptures according to their own understanding of them, and to do what they can to make them plain to the understandings of their hearers or readers, is readily admitted. But no man has a right to require others to assent to his interpretations contrary to the convictions of their own consciences, nor to set up his own explanations as of equal authority with the word of God. As it is my duty to explain the Scriptures according to the impartial dictates of my own understanding, I ought to know that it is the duty of my brethren to explain according to their respective understandings, and not according to mine. If they dissent from me, I ought to consider that I also dissent from them; and the same candor and forbearance which I may reasonably desire from them towards myself, I should evince in my conduct towards them.

To the honor and praise of the Four Evangelists, it has been said of them, that, in their history of our Lord, "They tell the world what he said, and what

he did; but they invariably leave the judgment that ought to be formed of both, to the discernment of their readers." * Happy it would have been for the Christian world if all creed-makers had adopted the wise policy of the Evangelists, so far as to give all articles of faith in the language of the inspired writers, or as nearly so as possible. Summaries of the Christian faith in this form might have been very useful, and have been the means of preserving union and peace among the disciples of the common Lord. Notes and comments too might have been safely added, as accompaniments of the articles, had they been properly distinguished from the articles, and only given as the opinions of fallible men, with proper cautions to the reader to consider them in no other light—but to use his own understanding, and all the means he may possess to ascertain what is truth and what is error. "Add thou not to his words, lest he reprove thee, and thou be found a liar." Such is the wise counsel of Agur. Mr. Poole, in his Annotations on this text says—"As the word of God is pure, do not thou corrupt and abuse it by adding to it thy own or other men's inventions and opinions, and delivering or receiving them in the name and as the words of God." Prov. xxx. 6.

Now I may seriously ask, were not the doctrines of Transubstantiation and vicarious punishment formed by *adding* to the word of God the "inventions and opinions" of men? Have not these "inventions and opinions been delivered and received as the

* Dr. Campbell.

words of God?" And have they not been treated as such by the propagators of these doctrines, in their denunciations against those who dissent from them? I may also ask, has it not been by thus adding the opinions of men to the word of God, that all the creed-making sects have formed their essential articles of faith—all the articles which have caused alienation and strife among Christians? If such a mode of forming articles of faith may not be called *adding* to God's words, I know not what deserves that name.

If articles of faith, expressed in the words of Scripture, were accompanied by such notes, and comments as I have mentioned, with proper cautions to the reader to distinguish between the words of Scripture and the opinions of the compilers, there would be no ground for the charge of adding to the words of God. But when fallible and uninspired men venture to assert their own opinions as the doctrines of the Gospel, and make them a test of Christian faith or a Christian character, they appear to me to act in direct violation of the counsel of Agur, and assume an authority in the church which God has never delegated to any of the sons of men. To make such articles of faith the standard by which men must be measured for admission into the church, or for exclusion from it, is, in my opinion perfectly unwarranted by the Scriptures, and in a high and reprehensible sense adding to the word of God.

The counsel of Agur is enforced by the admonitory clause "lest he reprove thee and thou be found a liar."

"Lest he reprove thee." Lest God reprove thee by the course of his providence. There are various ways in which God may reprove the imprudences and the vices of mankind. A great portion of the troubles which come on imprudent or vicious men in the present life, may properly be regarded as reproofs or chastenings from the hand of God. Such evils may occur in the natural course of providence, and yet be of the nature of reproof. The alienations, contentions and innumerable difficulties which have occurred among Christians, are the natural and direct fruit of adding to God's words, in forming articles of faith, and seem to me of the nature of reproof for such conduct, and as evidence of divine disapprobation.

"And thou be found a *liar*." I do not think that men are generally guilty of intentional falsehood when they add to God's words in forming articles of faith; and probably Agur meant no more by the word "liar," than one who ventures to assert his own opinions of the word of God as of equal authority with the word itself. When a man has so little sense of his own fallibility as to do this, or is possessed of such arrogance or self-sufficiency, as to assume such a power, he exposes himself to the charge of uttering that which is really false, although he may fancy that it is the truth. He may be free from the charge of intentional falsehood, while he is verily guilty of uttering false opinions, as the doctrines of the Gospel. In this respect, how often are men found guilty, through self-sufficiency or the want of that humility and caution which ever become uninspired men!

Having said so much against forming articles of faith in the "words of man's wisdom," I ought perhaps freely to confess, that there was a time when I could express in my own language what I thought to be the meaning of the Scriptures, as articles of faith to be adopted by a church But in several particulars my own views afterwards became so changed that I could not again have assented to the articles of my own forming. These facts with further reflections and inquiries convinced me, that there is neither safety nor propriety in the common mode of forming articles of faith; that such compositions operate as fetters to the mind in regard to free inquiry after truth, and as obstructions to the progress of light; that they expose the members of a church to be involved in contentions, or to act the part of hypocrites or persecutors,—and that the adoption of such articles by a church, implies a presumption of such infallibility on the part of the framers or the receivers, as is not warranted by either Scripture, reason, or experience, but is contradicted by them all.

LETTER VI.

THE MESSIAH'S CENSURES OF THE SCRIBES AND PHARISEES.

My Christian Brethren,

THOSE who are in the habit of uttering censures against their dissenting brethren, imagine that their

conduct may be justified by Scripture examples. These I shall examine in this and subsequent letters.

That the Messiah censured the Scribes and Pharisees cannot be denied; and his awful language respecting them, as we have it recorded in the 23d chapter of Matthew, has been viewed as sufficient to warrant the party censures of the present day. "Wo unto you scribes and pharisees, hypocrites," is many times repeated; and to this language partizans appeal to justify their own sweeping denunciations, against such as dissent from their religious opinions. But is there not a great difference between the authority of Christ to judge the hearts of men, and the authority of any man of the present age?

Besides, it seems to me that the spirit of our Lord's language has been grossly misapprehended. When a person is himself under the influence of resentful passions, the language "Wo unto you" will seem to be the proper expression of such feelings. But let him be under the influence of benevolent feelings, and the same words may appear to him with an entirely different aspect, and as the expression of pitying love or commisseration, towards persons whose characters expose them to the displeasure of Heaven. In the latter sense they are viewed and explained by Dr. Campbell; and in this sense I think they ought to be regarded. When thus viewed, they imply nothing indignant or resentful, any more than the prayer on the the cross "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." When Christ's language is referred to as justifying party denunciations, an indignant, resentful

and imprecating spirit is imputed to him, which as I conceive, was foreign from his heart. "Alas for you"—or "Wo *is* unto you," is, I believe, the correct interpretation; not "Wo *be* unto you," as has been often imagined.

When our Lord predicted the destruction of Jerusalem, he used the following language: "Wo unto the women with child, and to them that give suck in those days." The peculiar situation of these women was deprecated as what would add to their distress in such a time of general calamity; and no one can doubt, in this case, that the language of Christ was the language of pity, not of indignation or censure. It is very true that Christ imputed blame to the scribes and pharisees, and not to the women, whose condition he deplored. The blame however imputed to the scribes and pharisees, was not expressed in the words translated "Wo unto you," but by the words that followed, in which he described their wicked conduct. The Saviour possessed God-like benevolence; while he abhorred sin, he loved and pitied the sinner. A deficiency in this respect is too often apparent in many who profess to be his disciples. Is it not too generally so with partizans of every sect? And will not this defect in a great measure account for the adoption of the persecuting principle, which imputes error of judgment, or supposed error of opinion, to wickedness of heart? How exceedingly different was the benevolence of the Saviour from that affection which is confined to a party, and which under a pretext of love to the truth, can calumniate a dissenting brother!

I have admitted that Christ censured the scribes and pharisees; but for what did he censure them? Was it for any error at all resembling the supposed errors of opinion by which Christians at this day are divided into sects? or for which Christians of one sect denounce those of another? On the contrary, was it not for immorality in practice, and for such errors relating to the law of God, as encouraged immorality? Let any one impartially examine what Jesus said of these men in the chapter which has been mentioned, and on other occasions; and he will find that so far as his censures had any reference to error of opinion, they were such errors as encouraged immorality and crime. By their expositions of the law and their regard to traditions, the scribes and pharisees made "the word of God of no effect," and made their religion a cloak for their covetousness. They "devoured widow's houses," while "for a pretence they made long prayers"—they "paid tithes of mint, annise, and cummin," while they "passed over the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy and faith," or "justice, humanity and fidelity."* They made "clean the outside of the cup and the platter," while "within they were full of extortion and excess." They professed a great regard for the Sabbath, while they could spend it in calumniating the Saviour for his beneficent miracles on that day. Yes, and while such was their own inconsistency, they could "trust in themselves that they were righteous and despise others"—even the Messiah himself.

* Campbell's translation.

Such were the grounds on which the Saviour censured the scribes and pharisees. How very dissimilar are these from such supposed errors of opinion as are at this day made the grounds of reproach by the partizans of different sects! When men of licentious habits give such expositions of divine precepts, as are adapted to countenance their immoral conduct, we have then reason to fear that their errors of opinion proceed from depravity of heart. Such appears to have been the fact with the scribes and pharisees. This was known to our Lord; for he knew what was in man. But no one of these facts afford any proof that the differences of opinion among Christians, which do not relate to moral precepts, are the fruit of depravity, on which side soever the error may be found. Much less, if possible, do such facts prove that the errors are on the part of the accused, and not on the part of accusers; nor that the censures may on either part be justified. How does it appear that the accused sects are more liable or more likely to be in error than their accusers? I know not: and I suspect that there are few persons who will be able to answer the question in a manner satisfactory even to themselves.

It is worthy of serious inquiry whether the opinion which leads partizans to think they may be justified in reproaching others for supposed misinterpretations of Scripture, is not in fact an error of the same nature of those for which Christ reproved the scribes and pharisees—an error that makes "the word of God of no effect," which forbids censorious

judging, and speaking evil one of another. If anything is immoral, it is immorality to violate these precepts.

LETTER VII.

PAUL'S CENSURES OF SCHISMATIC TEACHERS.

My Christian Brethren,

PERHAPS there is not another passage in the Bible which has been more frequently perverted than the following:—"I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ, unto another Gospel, which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the Gospel of Christ. But though we or an angel from heaven, preach any other Gospel unto you, than that which we preached unto you, let him be accursed." Gal. i. 6, 7, 8.

This language of Paul to the Galatians is one of the strong holds to which censorious Christians of all sects resort in justification of schismatic conduct, or such reproachful language as tends to alienate Christians from each other. By this example of Paul, the Catholics justify their anathemas against Protestants; and Protestants of different sects on

the same ground justify their censures of the Catholics and of one another. But to the Pope himself, and to every minister of the Gospel, who like the Pope denounces fellow Christians on account of difference of opinion, these questions may be urged,—Art thou like Paul, invested with apostolic authority and miraculous powers? Hast thou like him, been inspired to teach the doctrines of Christ, and to distinguish between truth and error? And what analogy is there between the doctrine which Paul censured, and any doctrine which in modern times has divided Christians of our land; or on account of which they have censured one another?

From the contents of the epistle to the Galatians, it appears, that soon after they had received the Gospel, and had been formed into a church state, certain teachers came among them who were zealous for the Mosaic rituals, and who ventured to teach these Christians that circumcision was necessary to salvation. The same doctrine had been taught at Antioch, and had occasioned the council which was held at Jerusalem; the records of whose proceedings we have in the fifteenth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles. This council decided that circumcision was not to be required of the Gentile converts. But this result seems not to have been satisfactory to all the Jews who believed in Jesus as the Messiah. Some of them were disposed to make circumcision an essential article of the Christian religion, and thus taught the gentile converts, "except ye be circumcised, ye cannot be

saved! Had these teachers merely practised circumcision to satisfy their own consciences, Paul would probably have made no objection. For he was himself so liberal on this point that he readily consented to the circumcision of Timothy, whose father was a Greek, when he found this to be necessary to satisfy the consciences of others—or necessary to the usefulness of his son in the faith.* But the teachers whose conduct was censured by Paul, undertook to introduce an article as essential to the salvation of others, which the Messiah had not enjoined; and on this ground they were disposed to make a division in the church, by excluding those who dissented from their creed, and also reviled the apostle himself. It was for this schismatic conduct that they were censured. In Paul's view they preached another Gospel, or a pretended Gospel, contrary to the one he had taught, and which the Galatians had received—and contrary, too, to the great doctrine of union and peace. From Paul's writings, it is very clear that his prayer was the same as that of Christ, that believers might be one, and be preserved from division. Of no other persons did he speak with such severity as of schismatic teachers. The language quoted at the head of this letter, is awfully severe; and in another part of the same epistle, he said to the Galatians, "I would that they were even cut off who trouble you."

Paul also exhorted the Christians at Rome, in the following manner:—"Mark them who cause divis-

* Acts xvi, 1.

ions and offences, contrary to the doctrine ye have received, and avoid them." To Titus he thus wrote: "A man that is an heretic, after the first and second admonition, reject." Titus iii. 10. In Dr. Campbell's opinion, instead of "a man that is an heretic" the Greek words should have been translated, "a factious man"—meaning one who was disposed to promote contentions and divisions in the church. It was against such men that Paul's thunders were uttered—against men who dared to make doctrines essential to salvation which had not been authorized as such by the Head of the church. I may here quote the last paragraph of Dr. Campbell's Dissertation on Heresy, as both pertinent and important:—

"I shall conclude with adding to the observations on schism and heresy, that how much soever of a schismatic or heretical spirit in the apostolic sense of the terms, may have contributed to the formation of the different sects into which the Christian world is at present divided, no person, who in the spirit of candor and charity adheres to that which to the best of his judgment is right, though in his opinion he should be mistaken, is in the Scripture sense either schismatic or heretic. And that he on the contrary, whatever sect he belong to, is more entitled to these odious appellations, who is the most apt to throw the imputation on others. Both terms, for they only denote different degrees of the same bad quality, always indicate a disposition and practice unfriendly to peace, harmony, and love."

In the same Dissertation, having shown how things

had been managed to make the term "heresy" applicable to error of judgment, Dr. Campbell remarked.—"Thus mere mistake is made at length to incur the reproach originally levelled against an assuming and factious temper, which would sacrifice the dearest interests of society to its own ambition."

Two striking facts relating to the teachers who were censured by Paul, should not be overlooked nor forgotten.

I. These teachers were men who dared to teach a doctrine as essential to salvation, and as a test of Christian character, which no inspired teacher had ever exhibited in that light.

II. These teachers were, I think, of the first class of professed Christian teachers, who ventured to set up their own *interpretations* of Scripture as articles of faith essential to salvation, and as a test of Christian character.

It is very certain that Paul's censures were levelled against men who assumed this schismatic and creed-making power. Is it not then remarkable that, in modern times, those who have imitated the schismatic teachers, have also justified their own denouncing spirit by Paul's censure of the very principle and practice which they have adopted? Such inconsistency is not confined to any one sect: it has been common to individuals of various denominations.

LETTER VIII.

PAUL'S ACCOUNT OF THE NATURAL MAN.

My Christian Brethren,

THE following is the language of the Apostle Paul :—

"For the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." 1 Cor. ii. 14.

Dr. Macknight translates the verse as follows :—

"Now an animal man receiveth not the things of the spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually examined."

This text is often quoted to account for the difference of opinion, which occurs between persons of different sects, by imputing the opinion of one of the parties to moral depravity, or an unconverted state. I shall therefore exhibit what I believe to be the meaning of the text, and then inquire respecting the propriety of the common mode of applying it. "The natural man," or "animal man," I suppose to be one who is governed by animal or fleshly appetites, lusts or passions, and who seeks the gratification of these as his highest good, and in this way becomes blind to the value and importance of spiritual things.

By "the things of the Spirit of God," I understand the doctrines and precepts of God, revealed by the

Holy Spirit. These things are not received by the natural man. His heart is so set on other objects, the gratification of his animal desires, that he has no cordial relish for divine truths. His understanding and conscience may acknowledge their importance, but his heart says—"Go away for this time, and when I have a more convenient season, I will" attend to them. On such ground the things of the spirit are regarded as foolishness, or of little value compared with sensual gratifications.

"Neither can he know them." It cannot, I think, have been the intention of the Apostle to represent the natural man as an excusable idiot, destitute alike of a good heart, of reason, understanding and common sense, and thus incapable of knowing his duty, or the meaning of words. In such a case he could not be regarded as an accountable or moral being. To "*know*" often means the same as to *approve*, *acknowledge* or *enjoy*, and has respect to the heart, rather than to the understanding. In such a sense of the word it is very obvious that a man governed by fleshly lusts, cannot know, approve, or enjoy the things of the Spirit of God, while in such a state.

The reason assigned by the Apostle is, "because they are spiritually *discerned*," or "*examined*." Dr. Macknight paraphrases the words as follows—"Neither can he know them because they are spiritually examined—examined by the light which revelation, not reason, affords." This may possibly be the meaning, but to me it appears quite as probable that by the last clause Paul meant to teach that cordially

to know, approve, or enjoy the precepts and truths of religion, we must have a spiritual taste or relish adapted to spiritual objects—in other words a disposition to love what is true and excellent. A worldly minded man may understand the precept, "set not your affections on things below." A revengeful man may understand the exhortation—"avenge not yourselves." The reviler may understand the precept, "Speak not evil one of another." In each case, while the mind understands, the heart may be opposed to obedience, so that in the apostles sense of the words, he cannot "know" the things required or forbidden. He has no relish for such instructions. He cannot say, "How sweet are thy words to my taste!"

Besides, a perverse taste or a disposition to indulge the fleshly lusts may be so strong—and probably often is so strong, as to prevent that attention to the precepts and truths of the gospel, which is really necessary to a correct discerning of their true import. The influence of party prejudices and passions, may often so bewilder the understanding as to occasion a false meaning of a divine precept to be preferred to the true meaning. Dr. Campbell, if I rightly remember, has given a striking instance of this, in an address to the people of Scotland. He informs us that when it was the fashion to murder men for their supposed heretical opinions, the command of Christ, "Love your enemies," was said by the clergy not to mean, "enemies to our faith," but "personal enemies." Hence they inferred that destroying dissenters for their opinions

was not forbidden by this divine precept. In this place I may ask, does it not appear from the conduct of many, that the commands, "Judge not that ye be not judged," and "Speak not evil one of another," are so interpreted as not to forbid the most censorious judging and reviling of those who dissent from their opinions?

I may now inquire respecting the propriety of quoting Paul's language respecting the natural man, to account for the differences of opinion between persons of different sects. I may remark,

1. That the greater part of the disputes among Christians result from the ambiguity of words and phrases, while each admits the text to be true in the sense which he supposes was intended by the inspired writer.

2. If the words of Paul may properly be applied by either party, the ground is common, and the other party may retort the insinuation.

A case may now be stated to test the principle, or the propriety of such a proceeding.

Two persons are disputing on the words of Christ, "I lay down my life for the sheep." One supposes the words to mean that he would suffer a vicarious punishment for mankind. The other believes that he died for us, but not in that sense of the words, yet in a sense which he thinks far more to the honor of God. These men happen to be of different characters, as well as of different opinions. One of them is meek and humble; the other self-sufficient—he trusts in himself that he is righteous and despises

others. Now which of these men will be the more likely to account for the difference of opinion by insinuating that the other is a natural man? In this case no candid and intelligent person can hesitate for a moment. On which side soever the self-sufficient person may be, as to the meaning of the text, he will be the one to reproach his brother as a "natural man." Candor, however, requires me to admit, that there may have been instances in which good men in other respects have been so bewildered by custom, theory, or party feelings, as to adopt such an unchristian mode of proceeding. But I believe it to be a truth, that such a course is much more frequently resorted to by self-righteous hypocrites, than by men of truly Christian feelings; and that it behooves those who are in the habit of thus accounting for a dissent from their opinions, seriously to inquire how their conduct can be reconciled with gospel love and humility, and whether they are not in fact, in that deplorable state which they are so forward to impute to others.

Should any still imagine that it was the intention of Paul to represent every unconverted man as naturally incapable of knowing the true meaning of gospel precepts and doctrines, and that this is the reason why he misinterprets them; I may ask, on what ground can he be justly condemned for not receiving and obeying the truth? What better excuse can any man possess, for not doing the will of God than this, that he is naturally incapable of understanding the meaning of divine precepts and prohibitions?

If there be any blame in such a case, on whom does it fall? on the creature, or his Creator?

Besides, if the natural man has no perception of the truth, how can he be said to *hate* the truth? Can he hate that which he does not perceive? Should it be said that it is not the *true* meaning of Scripture that he hates, but a *false* meaning which he gives to the words; what is this but saying in other words that it is falsehood, and not truth, that the sinner hates?

Where there is no law there is no transgression, and surely there is no law to him who has not natural understanding to perceive what a law forbids or requires. The following are divine precepts—"Thou shalt not kill; Thou shalt not commit adultery; Thou shalt not steal." These are among "the things of the spirit of God." But if the natural man perceives not their meaning, why should he be punished for apparent transgression?

Some perhaps will plead that the words of Paul do not extend to such plain precepts and prohibitions, but are to be limited to the doctrines of the gospel. But how is this known? The precepts and prohibitions of God are surely the best tests of the moral character, and they are as properly "the things of the spirit," as the doctrines revealed. Besides, no man is blameable for not believing a doctrine which he does not and cannot understand, any more than for not obeying a precept which he never saw nor heard.

If the "things of the spirit of God," do not include *all* that is revealed by the spirit, who shall draw

the line or set the limits between the things meant, and the things not meant? I may further observe, that the most important doctrines of the gospel are as plain and easy to be understood as the precepts and prohibitions. "Unto us there is but one God, the Father," is as plain as the first and great commandment: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God," &c. "Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the living God," is as plain as the precept, "All things whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even the same to them." Now what is there in either of these doctrines or precepts which is not intelligible to an unconverted man, and as intelligible to him as to the converted, so far as mere intellect is concerned in understanding them? And are not these doctrines and precepts in fact understood by thousands of wicked men, as they are understood by good men? The feelings and relish of the heart may be very different in the two classes of people. To the one the doctrines and precepts may be sources of delight, while the other regards them with indifference, and treats them with disrespect. If I understand the Scriptures, the defect of the sinner consists not in the want of natural understanding to "*know* his master's will," but in the want of an obedient temper of heart.

It will perhaps be pleaded by some that Scripture propositions have an internal sense, different from the natural meaning of the words, and that this is what the natural man cannot discern. There are undoubtedly many passages of Scripture which have a mean-

ing different from the common acceptation of the words. Our Lord once said, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." The Jews who heard him supposed him to mean their splendid house for worship, which they said had been forty-six years in building. "Howbeit," says the Evangelist, "he spake of the temple of his body." Now what is there in this internal sense, when thus explained, that is not easy to be understood by any unconverted man of common sense? All the parables of Christ have a meaning distinct from the literal sense of the words. This may be called the internal sense, but when this sense is explained, it may be as intelligible to a wicked man as to a good man. In explaining the parable of the sower, Christ said, "The seed is the word." Now this is just as plain to an unconverted man as if he had said, "The seed is wheat." When Jesus uttered the parable of the vineyard, "the chief priests and the scribes the same hour sought to lay hands on him." Why so? Not because they could not understand the meaning, but because "they *perceived* that he had spoken the parable against them." Now this parable was one of "the things of the spirit of God," and yet these wicked Jews "perceived" the meaning, without waiting for an explanation. Those who were "cut to the heart" by the dying speech of Stephen, seem clearly to have understood what he spoke against them, though they were so wicked that they stoned him to death for his faithful reproofs and admonitions.

As further proof that Paul's meaning has been misapprehended, I may remark, that in the days of Ezekiel, God appealed to the reason and conscience of a wicked people to decide on the equity of his conduct towards them. "Are not my ways equal? Are not your ways unequal?" But if the sinner is so deficient in intellect, that he cannot understand the meaning of God's words, of what use could be such an appeal?

I may also remark, that the duty of every man is limited by the extent of his understanding. To love the Lord with all the understanding, is all that is required of any man, whether that understanding be great or small. Of course, if the natural man is so deficient in intellect that he cannot understand any of God's precepts, he is under no obligation to obey them.

In both the Old Testament and the New, the conversion of sinners is represented as the effect of divine truth on their minds. "The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul. The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple." Psalm xix. 7. "Being born again not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God which liveth and abideth forever." I Pet. i. 23. Now if the unconverted, as such, are incapable of perceiving the true meaning of Scripture language, and consequently misunderstand it; then it must be by a false meaning of the word that they are converted. Of course, their conversion must be the effect of *falsehood*, and not of *truth*. For they are in an unconverted state

till the change occurs; and it is by such views of the word as they have in an unconverted state that they are regenerated, or that the work of regeneration is commenced.

If men come into the world with a nature which renders them incapable of understanding the meaning of divine precepts, they are no more blameable for not perceiving their meaning, than is the man who was born blind, for not being able to distinguish the colors of the rainbow. Besides, when the precepts of a parent are conformable to truth, or to the precepts of God, an unconverted or disobedient child is just as liable to misconceive the meaning of a parental precept, as a precept of the gospel. If the child is naturally incapable of understanding a precept, why does the parent give it? When a reasonable parent perceives that a child has misunderstood his precept through a defect of intellect, or ignorance of the meaning of words, he of course excuses the child: so we may presume it is with our heavenly Father.

LETTER IX.

THE INJUNCTIONS AND EXAMPLE OF CHRIST.

My Christian Brethren,

Among the numerous injunctions of the Saviour there is perhaps not one which has been treat-

ed with less respect or more frequently violated than the following:

"Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged; and with what measure ye mete it shall be measured to you again." Matt. vii. 1, 2.

Luke has expressed the injunction, differently:

"Judge not and ye shall not be judged. Condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned." Luke vi. 37.

How very little are these injunctions regarded by different sects of Christians in their treatment of one another! It will be pleaded that no one can suppose that Christ meant to prohibit all kinds and instances of judging. He could not mean to prohibit judicial decisions in courts of justice, and probably nothing was prohibited by these injunctions but what may properly be called rash and censorious judging or condemning one another. Be it even so. What then is rash and censorious judging? If I judge and condemn my brother as a wicked man merely because he dissents from my opinion respecting some important texts which we both admit to be genuine Scripture, am I not chargeable with rash and censorious judging? Or if I say that it is owing to the wickedness of his heart that he dissents from me, is not this rash and censorious? How often has the censorious accuser been the one in error? Was not Jesus in the right, as to his opinion of what it was lawful to do on the Sabbath? Yet on account of his healing on that day the Phar-

isees ventured to say "We know that this man is a sinner." Why then may I not be liable to a similar error when I thus judge my dissenting brother? If I am not inspired, how do I know that the error is not on my part? Or that my brother is less honest than I am in his inquiries after truth?

The reason given by Christ why we should forbear judging is deserving of notice. "For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged; and with what measure ye mete it shall be measured to you again." This I consider as similar to the admonition given to Peter, "For he that taketh the sword shall perish by the sword." It was not, I conceive, the intention of our Saviour to be understood in either case, that the wrong done would in every instance be retaliated; nor that those who should retaliate would do right; but to forewarn his disciples of what would be the natural consequence of such rash and injurious measures. As a motive to forbear such conduct, he would have his disciples keep in view the common retributions of providence, even in the present state. Now what is more common than for censorious persons to be censured? Or for warriors, duellists and assassins, to perish by the sword, or suffer a violent death?

Another precept of Christ is this—"All things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them." This precept is as applicable to judging one another as to any part of human conduct. But where is the Christian who "would"

that his brother should impute supposed errors of opinion to the wickedness of his heart? If I would that others should forbear thus to judge me, then of course I should forbear thus to judge them. This is called the Golden Rule on account of its excellence. But alas, how often is it treated by professed Christians as of no worth at all!

I have still another precept of Christ to exhibit; but I shall first present his *example;* because the other precept makes his example the rule of our conduct.

The dispute by the way.

On a certain occasion, Jesus thus interrogated his disciples, "What was it that ye disputed by the way? But they held their peace; for by the way they had disputed among themselves, who should be the greatest." Mark ix. 33—4. The circumstances of this case are remarkable. So also was our Lord's manner of treating his apostles on that occasion, while they were in gross errors of opinion. Though they had been for a considerable time in his family, and under his tuition, daily hearing his discourses and witnessing his miracles, they still retained the errors of education respecting the object of his mission and the nature of his kingdom. From various facts it is obvious that they supposed the Messiah was to be a temporal prince, that his kingdom was to be of this world, that he would reign on the throne of David, and deliver the Jews from their subjection to the Romans. As Christ

had selected the twelve for his special associates, they naturally supposed that they should be his principal ministers, when he should assume the regal power. The dispute by the way appears to have been on this question, Who of them should be the first minister of state. It seems that more than one of them was ambitious for this dignity. On another occasion James and John appear to have solicited the two highest offices, one on his right hand, the other on his left; and their mother is represented as having urged the same request in their behalf. What would now be thought of ministers of the Gospel who should evince such ignorance and error respecting the purpose of the Messiah's mission, and the nature of his kingdom!

How then did Christ treat these erring apostles? Did he denounce them as his enemies? Did he impute their error of opinion to the depravity of their hearts? Did he show towards them any bitterness or alienation? Not any thing of this kind is to be found on record. When he saw them struck dumb by his questions,—"What is it that ye disputed by the way?" "He called a little child and set him in the midst of them," as an emblem of that humility which became them as his disciples, and said to them "Except ye be converted and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of God." Matt. xviii. 2. This was, indeed, a reproof, not for their errors of opinion, but for their ambition and contention. In further discoursing with them, he let them know that he that would be great in his

kingdom, must be like his Lord, of a meek and humble temper, ready to be "servant of all" in the work of doing good. It is, however, a remarkable fact, that the apostles retained their error in regard to the object of his mission and the nature of his kingdom, till the very moment of his ascension. For it appears that the last question they proposed to him implied that error.—"Wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom unto Israel?" In reply he said to them, "It is not for you to know the times and the seasons which the Father hath put in his own power. But ye shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you, and ye shall be witnesses unto me in Jerusalem, and in Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost parts of the earth. And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up and a cloud received him out of their sight." Acts i. 6, 7, 8.

To me it is probable that the apostles had supposed the mission of the Messiah to be for a two-fold purpose: the religious reformation of the Jews, and their political redemption from the Roman yoke. But it is pretty evident that the latter purpose was regarded by them as the main object; and that they possessed no clear views of the nature of his kingdom till they were miraculously endued on the day of Pentecost. Yet Christ bore with them, continued them in his service, instructed them as they were able to receive, and finally employed them as his apostles of salvation. He not only assured them of his own love, but of the love of the Father, on ac-

count of their love to him, and their belief that he "proceeded forth and came from God." This was done in the last interview prior to his death; and in the same interview he gave them his New commandment. "A new commandment," said he "I give unto you, that ye love one another as I have loved you," to which I shall now pay some attention.

This command he repeatedly uttered in the same conversation, as though it were of the very first importance, and on obedience to which, very much was depending. It may naturally be inquired, why was Jesus so urgent and impressive in giving this precept to his disciples? And why did he so long defer to correct their errors relating to his mission and his kingdom? As Jesus knew what was in man, he very well knew that his disciples in all ages would be liable to errors, and to differences of opinion, while in the body. He also knew how prone mankind are to judge and censure one another on account of differences of opinion, or supposed errors. He knew, too, of how great importance it would be that his apostles should be united in affection, and show a constant regard to his precepts in their examples before the world. He had before given them the Golden Rule; but this was more liable to be misapprehended than a precept founded on his own example—on what they all knew to have been his conduct towards them. He therefore gave them the "new commandment," which, every time it should occur to their minds, must naturally bring to view his example as the standard of their love one

to another. "This is my commandment, that ye love one another, as I have loved you."

There might be several reasons why Christ neglected to explain to his apostles at an earlier period the nature of his kingdom, and to show them clearly their error in supposing that he had come to reign as a temporal Prince. I shall however mention but one. The course which he adopted gave an opportunity to evince by his own example the spirit of benignity and forbearance, which would become his followers in their treatment one of another, in regard to supposed or real errors of opinion. Had there been no difference of opinion between him and his apostles, there would have been no opportunity for such a display of forbearing love as he evinced towards them. Hence the new commandment could not have appeared with the force and importance which it now does, in view of all the circumstances under which it was delivered. The apostles themselves could not have had a perfect view of its force and beauty till the day of Pentecost, when their eyes were opened. But after this, they could see what errors they had entertained during the whole of Christ's ministry, and what forbearing kindness he had constantly displayed towards them, notwithstanding their errors. How affecting and impressive must have been the recollection of his words.—"This is my commandment, that ye love one another as I have loved you!" So when differences of opinion afterwards occurred between any of the apostles, or between them and other disciples,

this new commandment was at hand, as a light to their feet and a lamp to their way.

This precept was addressed to the apostles, who had personally witnessed and experienced Christ's candor and benignity towards erring men; and the words may be regarded as the injunction of a head of a family when about to leave his children; but it was doubtless meant for the benefit of Christians in all succeeding ages. For it was at the close of the interview in which this command was uttered, that Jesus poured out his soul in prayer to the Father, that all who should become believers in him might "be one." It is the love required by this commandment, which unites Christians to one another and to their Lord.

Had Christians from the beginning been duly mindful of the dying injunction and prayer of Christ, they never could have been divided into hostile sects and parties; every species of persecution would have been avoided; and Christians would have been distinguished in every age by the characteristic mentioned by their Lord:—"By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another."

LETTER X.

PAUL'S REASONINGS AND EXPOSTULATIONS WITH CONTENDING CHRISTIANS AT ROME.

My Christian Brethren,

In the time of Paul, the church at Rome was composed partly of Jews and partly of Gentiles, or of converts to Christianity from these two classes of people. As these converts had been differently educated, they possessed clashing prejudices and opinions, relating to certain rituals and observances of the Jewish religion. This diversity of opinion and prejudice, gave rise not only to disputation, but to censorious judging; Paul wrote to them on the subject, and exerted his reasoning powers and his influence, to check the propensity to censoriousness, and to show them how the controversy might be put to rest. As he was an inspired teacher, it may be useful to observe his manner of treating his brethren, some of whom he knew to be in error.

"Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations. For one believeth that he may eat all things; another who is weak eateth herbs. Let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not; and let not him that eateth not, judge him that eateth; for God hath received him. Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? To his own Master he standeth or falleth. Yea, he

shall be holden up, for God is able to make him stand. One man esteemeth one day above another. Another esteemeth every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind. He that regardeth the day, regardeth it to the Lord; and he that regardeth not the day, to the Lord he doth not regard it. He that eateth, eateth to the Lord; for he giveth God thanks; and he that eateth not, to the Lord he eateth not, and giveth God thanks.—But why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? For we must all stand before the judgment seat of Christ." Rom. xiv. 1—6, and 10th.

In this passage we have a case in which a difference of opinion had occasioned serious difficulty, and censorious judging. Christians of the present time will probably say, that the questions in dispute, were trifling, and ought to have occasioned no alienation among brethren. The questions, however, did not appear to be trifling to the parties concerned; and they were not, perhaps, in reality more trifling or unimportant than most of the questions in dispute at the present day. Party spirit can magnify the importance of any subject in favor of which it is indulged. Besides, the questions at Rome involved cases of conscience in relation to duty; and such questions cannot appear trifling to conscientious persons. No difficulty, however, would have occurred, no censorious judging, had each party been willing that the other should obey the dictates of conscience, without molestation or censure. But

one assumed the right of judging for the other; and this always tends to mischief. I may then observe the manner in which Paul expostulated with these contending Christians.

1. Paul did not assume the right of blaming either party, on account of the opinions entertained. One party or the other must, indeed, have erred in judgment, and Paul doubtless knew which party had the more correct opinion. But it appears that the error of opinion was regarded by him as of little consideration, compared with the error of temper, which each party indulged towards the other. He well knew that people were liable to differ in opinion, and that it was the duty of each to love God with all his own understanding, and to do what he conscientiously believed that God required of him. Paul did not impute the error of opinion to wickedness of heart. He had not so learned Christ, nor his religion.

2. Paul gave the parties clearly to understand, that if they obeyed the dictates of conscience, acting uprightly for God, error of opinion would not prevent the acceptableness of their different modes of conduct. Though the parties differed in practice as well as opinion in regard to days and meats; yet he charitably expressed the opinion, that both parties aimed at the same end, and that the conduct of each was acceptable in the sight of God. "He that regardeth the day, regardeth it to the Lord; and he that regardeth not the day, to the Lord he doth not

regard it;" that is, they both aimed at the glory of the Lord.

3. We should observe with what solemnity the apostle expostulated with the parties, on account of their contention and censorious judging. "Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? To his own Master he standeth or falleth; yea, he shall be holden up, for God is able to make him stand." Again, "Why dost thou judge thy brother? Or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? For we must all stand before the judgment seat of Christ." Thus while he blamed neither party, on account of its opinions, he blamed both for their contention, and their censorious manner of judging one another.

4. It is to be remarked that Paul did not so much as express his opinion on the questions in dispute, till he had assured them that their difference of opinion was not a proper ground of contention or of censure. But having expostulated with them on the unreasonableness of their censorious conduct, one towards the other, he expressed his opinion on a question in dispute. "I know, and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus, that there is nothing unclean in itself." He, however, immediately adds,—"but to *him* that *thinketh* anything unclean, *to him it is unclean.*"

By this decision he clearly maintained that the conscience or judgment of every person, in view of the divine requirements, must be the rule of his duty.

Dr. Macknight has an important note on the 6th verse of this chapter, a part of which may here be quoted. "Every man ought to believe concerning his neighbor that in all religious matters he acts according to conscience, especially if he professes so to do; and though his conscience may be ill informed; he should be left to its dictates in these matters. The Greek commentators affirm that the rules in this chapter relate to meats and fastings only, and not to doctrines of faith and matters of great importance. But I see no reason for that limitation. The rights of conscience and private judgment are the more sacred, the more important the affairs are about which they are exercised. And, therefore, in everything of importance, as well as in lesser matters, a man's own judgment and conscience, and not the opinion and conscience of another, are appointed by Christ to be the rule of his conduct."

LETTER XI.

THE APOSTLE JAMES ON CENSORIOUS JUDGING.

My Christian Brethren,

THE following impressive language was addressed by James to the Christians of his day.

"Speak not evil one of another, brethren. He that speaketh evil of his brother, and judgeth his brother, speaketh evil of the law and judgeth the law. But if thou judge the law, thou art not a doer of the law, but a judge. There is one law-giver who is able to save and to destroy. Who art thou that judgest another." James iv. 11, 12.

The following remarks are from Dr. Macknight's paraphrase of the two verses. "Speak not against one another, brethren, on account of your difference of opinions in religion. He who speaketh against his brother and condemneth his brother in matters pertaining to conscience, speaketh against the law both of Moses and Christ, which forbids that kind of speaking. Thou, who art *thou* that condemnest thy brother, and thereby assumest the prerogative of Christ?"

It may be asked, how can it be said that in judging and condemning a brother on account of his religious opinions, we judge and condemn the law? We practically judge and condemn the law when we do that which the law prohibits; for the language of our conduct is, that the law is unworthy to be obeyed. The law forbids bearing false witness; and I may be guilty of bearing false witness if I accuse a man of moral evil without evidence of his guilt. His differing from me in opinion is no proof of guilt on his part, for his opinion may be right while I think it to be erroneous; or if his opinion is not right, he may have been led into error by causes very different from that of a depraved heart. The

law requires my neighbor to love God with all *his* understanding, and not with *mine*. His differing from me is no proof that he does not love God with all his understanding. By condemning him I implicitly say, that the law is not as it should be, and that the man is blameable for not loving God according to *my* understanding. Again the law says, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." I must therefore be as tender of my brother's character as I wish him to be of mine. Do I then think it right in him, not only to impute to me error of opinion, but to ascribe that opinion to the pride or wickedness of my heart? If not, I practically speak against the law when I thus accuse my brother.

It would be in vain to search the scriptures for more clear prohibitions and expostulations against *murder*, than we have against *reviling* and *censorious judging* on account of differences of opinion; and is it not a lamentable truth that in each of the cases Christians have too commonly regarded custom as of higher authority than the prohibitions of God? The sixth commandment is, "Thou shalt do no murder;" but as soon as the rulers of two nations have declared war against each other, murder is regarded as not only lawful but laudable. So as soon as the ministers of one sect of Christians have ventured to denounce the people of another sect as heretics, the commands, "judge not" "condemn not," "speak not evil one of another," are treated with as little regard as the sixth commandment is in time of war. As in time of national hostilities, killing men is deemed a duty

and not a crime, so it is with censorious judging in time of sectarian hostilities; and in both cases the most glaring violations of the divine commands are vindicated on the principles of necessity and self preservation.

There are other melancholy coincidences in these two cases. In time of war the leaders of one party will deliver harangues, publish tracts, and insert articles in newspapers, of the most inflammatory kind, to excite a spirit of hostility against the people of another country, against eminent individuals, against the nation as a body, against thousands of better people than themselves, and against myriads of whose real characters they are perfectly ignorant. I appeal to the consciences of my fellow Christians to say, whether this atrocious policy has not its parallel in sectarian hostilities! Besides, when the rulers of a nation make war, not one in a hundred of those who engage in the quarrel, have any correct knowledge respecting the real grounds of the contest, nor is in a capacity to judge on which side there is the greater share of blame, nor whether, on the whole, there was the least cause or necessity for such a war. Yet, relying on their leaders, they will calumniate, condemn and fight. I need not show how this has a parallel in sectarian wars. But I may express the opinion that in both cases the laws of Christ are flagrantly violated; that christianity can never appear to advantage till such customs are abolished; and that in both cases an awful share of responsibility is attached to the conduct of those who take the lead in such conflicts.

In national wars, *love of country* is the boast of each party in the quarrel, yet the course pursued tends directly to fill both countries with crime and calamity. So in sectarian strife men profess to be influenced by love to Christ, love to the truth, and love to the souls of men. Yet the strife is carried on by disobedience to the commands of Christ—by conduct manifestly repugnant to his example and the spirit of his religion—by conduct too, which really tends to the ruin of souls. The love required by the gospel worketh no ill to its neighbor. Can this be said of the love displayed in the wars of nations, or the wars of different sects of Christians? If not, what awful delusions have prevailed in both cases! And how constantly is the reproof applicable—"Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of!" If God should be strict to mark *this* iniquity, who among us would be found able to stand?

LETTER XII.

FALSE STANDARDS OCCASION FALSE ESTIMATES.

My Christian Brethren,

MANKIND in their commercial dealings are often defrauded by the use of false balances, weights and

measures. In the concerns of religion, standards are used for estimating the characters and actions of men. Here, as well as in commerce, there may be false standards by which men may deceive, and be deceived. By adopting a false standard, the people of one sect may overrate their own worth, and undervalue the worth of people of other sects. It hence becomes a serious question whether false standards are not in use at the present day? and whether these are not the occasion of much censorious judging, as well as of self-deception?

Ever since Christians were divided into sects, creeds or confessions of faith have been set up as standards of character, or tests of moral worth. That many of these standards have been false may be obvious from the following considerations:—

1. In all the creed-making sects, each sect has a standard of its own, which is different, and in some particulars often directly opposite to that of another sect. Of course, there must be a false standard with one or the other, and perhaps with both of the two clashing sects.

2. It is a known fact that the creed of a sect may become so changed in a course of years, that what was once deemed essential, is afterwards deemed erroneous; still the sect may retain its distinctive name.

3. All party standards are formed by substituting the inferences or explanations of fallible men for the language of the inspired writers: and these tests, formed in the words of man's wisdom, are *preferred*

to the language of the Bible, and are passed as a substitute for the word of God, as bank bills are made a substitute for silver and gold. Is there nothing in this of too near an approach to self-sufficiency and self-exaltation?

4. "The poor have the gospel preached to them"—was a circumstance mentioned by our Lord, as a proof that the gospel day had commenced; because it had been predicted that such should be the case in the days of the Messiah, and that the way of holiness should be so plain as to be easily understood by the illiterate and the way-faring man. But what advantage can the gospel be to the illiterate and to children, if they are to be measured by such standards as have been adopted by many of the creed-making sects? How great a portion of those who give their assent to such creeds, are totally incapable of judging of their truth or correctness. Suppose I should subscribe a creed in a foreign language with which I am unacquainted, to obtain Christian privileges; what would be thought of me? and what should be thought of those who require such a subscription?

5. So far as articles of faith are made a test of character in the New Testament, they are the following:

That Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the living God: and

That God raised him from the dead.

A belief in the first of these articles was the test of discipleship during the ministry of Christ. After his crucifixion, a belief in his resurrection became

necessary to a belief that he was the Messiah. Hence a belief in the second article was required, as added by the Apostles. Accordingly Paul in stating the faith required said, "That is the word of faith which we preach—that if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thy heart that God raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved." John, in stating the object for which he wrote his gospel, said, "These things are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing ye might have life through his name." To persuade people to believe the two articles which have been named, was the great object of the sermons recorded in the Acts of the Apostles. These, if I mistake not, are the only articles of faith, a belief of which is spoken of in the New Testament as necessary to the Christian character, or as connected with regeneration, pardon, or eternal life.

A cordial belief in these articles naturally led to obedience to the precepts of Christ, and these are the appointed *standard* or *test* of moral character. Avowing a belief in Jesus as the Messiah, appears to have given such satisfaction to the Apostles, that, on such a profession, 3000 persons were admitted as converts or believers on the day of pentecost, the very day on which their profession was made. To be a disciple of Christ then meant to be a pupil or learner in his school. For admission to this school or the church of Christ, no articles of faith were proposed as terms, but the two which have been men-

tioned. We are not, however, to suppose that nothing was required of disciples but a belief in these articles, nor that Christ instituted no other test of moral character. As the followers of Jesus were then a persecuted people, to acknowledge him as the Messiah under such circumstances, afforded much evidence of integrity of heart; and when a person made this profession, he implicitly professed a desire to come under the guidance of Christ, and a willingness to conform to his precepts and example. Henceforth the precepts of Christ were to be regarded by him as the rule of duty, and the test of Christian character. That this is a correct view of the subject may appear from the following passages :—

"Not every one that saith unto me Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that *doeth the will of my Father* who is in heaven." Matt. vii. 21. "Therefore, whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and *doeth them*, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house upon a rock." v. 27. "And whosoever doth not bear his cross and come after me cannot be my disciple." Luke xiv. 27. "He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me." John xiv. 21. "If ye keep my commandments ye shall abide in my love." John xv. 10. "This is my commandment, that ye love one another as I have loved you." v. 12. "Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you." v. 14. "Hereby do we know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He that saith I know him, and

keepeth not his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him." 1 John ii. 3, 4.

Besides these plain declarations, as to the proper standard of Christian character, we are assured both by Christ and his apostles, that works of obedience will be rewarded at the final account, and that works of disobedience will be punished. But where shall we find in the Bible the least evidence that any man will be rewarded or accepted on account of his belief of such doctrines as are at this day made the test of Christian character? I know not; and I suspect that, after due examination, every honest man will be able to say the same.

Before I dismiss the subject of false standards or tests, it may be proper to mention one more, which I deem as dangerous as a party creed. It has been the opinion of many persons of different sects, that the heart of a true Christian, a spiritually-minded man, is a good test of the truth or falsehood of a proposed doctrine—that if the doctrine be true, it will be sweet to his taste—if false, it will be disgusting. Hence a believer in this opinion is prepared to say, "I *know* that this or that doctrine is true from my own experience," and in the same confident manner he will affirm of another doctrine that he *knows* it to be false. On this principle too, the same persons often feel at liberty to censure the hearts of their dissenting brethren. This opinion has ever appeared to me delusive and dangerous; and in support of this view of it, I shall suggest the following considerations.

1. Persons of different sects urge the same mode of proof in favor of opposite doctrines, each affirming that he *knows* his beloved doctrine to be true from his own experience, or its agreement with his own heart. When such opposite results occur from the same mode of proof, there must be gross delusion on one side or the other, and it may be so on both.

2. I believe it to be a fact that a good Christian will receive for truth any doctrine which he believes to have been revealed by God—just as a dutiful and confiding child will receive for truth whatever his pious parent inculcates as true and important. But such is the ambiguity of language, and such the imperfection of the child's understanding, that he may misapprehend the meaning of the words uttered by his father, and imbibe an idea very different from the one the parent meant to impress on his mind. In like manner the humble and confiding child of God may form an incorrect idea from the language used in the Bible. Besides, as children have very fallible guides in their parents, so have adult Christians fallible expositors in their public teachers.

3. There are thousand of cases in which falsehood will afford as great, and even greater delight to a good man than the truth. I will give one example—A benevolent father hears that his prodigal son, who had been absent for ten years, is now on his return, a penitent and reformed man. The report is accompanied with such circumstancesas precludes all doubt of its correctness. The father's heart leaps for joy. But alas! the report was founded on a mistake, and

of this the father is informed by the next mail. The report, however, while uncontradicted, had the same effect that it would have had if true;—and the father's feeling towards his son were as apparent and as commendable as they would have been had there been no mistake in the case.

Should it be said that this case cannot illustrate the effect of *divine truth* on the mind of a good man, I may ask, why not? The report was indeed of an historic nature; but the same may be said of many of the important truths of the gospel. It was so with the *glad tidings* of the birth of the Messiah; and such were the truths relating to his baptism, his ministry, his miracles, his death, his resurrection and ascension. Historical truths, therefore, may be divine truths of the first importance.

4. When any person makes his own heart or experience a test, by which to judge of the truth or falsehood of a particular doctrine, he assumes more than can be easily reconciled to Christian humility. For he assumes for a fact that he is not, like other men, liable to be misled by false information, by the ambiguity of words or phrases, by passion, nor by prejudice—in a word, that his mind is so enlightened and his heart so pure, that he is far less liable to err than any one of the multitude of people who dissent from his opinions.

Were there no other way to account for the pleasure which a good man feels in hearing a certain doctrine, but its truth, there would be less of danger in his making his heart a test of truth than now ex-

ists. But even in that case, his delight could be proof only to himself, unless others could know the state of his heart. Could it be shown that a good man's heart is an infallible test of truth, and could a man be found whose goodness would be universally acknowledged, then whatever creed he should approve might be safely adopted, and made a test by which to estimate the hearts of his fellow-men. But where shall such a man be found? Should any one propose himself for such a purpose, might not his humility be justly called in question? Yet what better than such arrogance is seen in any man who makes his own heart the test of truth, and his own creed the standard by which to estimate the moral worth of his fellow-men?

I have not a doubt that thousands of pious Catholics have found great delight in the doctrine of transubstantiation, while partaking of the bread and wine in the Lord's supper. But their delight results from a *belief* that the *doctrine is true*, and not from the *truth* of the doctrine. So good people of each sect may find pleasure in their respective doctrines, from a belief that they are true, honorable to God, and useful to man. Such pleasure in a doctrine may be a proof that it is sincerely believed to be true, but not a proof of its truth or correctness.

LETTER XIII.

THE DISREGARDED PARABLE.

My Christian Brethren,

The Gospel contains one parable which seems to me to have been very much overlooked or disregarded. I shall copy the parable according to Newcombe's translation. "Then he spake a parable to those that were invited, when he marked how they chose out of the chief places; saying unto them, When thou art invited by any man to a marriage feast, take not the chief place; lest a more honorable man than thou be invited by him; and he that invited thee and him come, and say to thee, Give place to this man; and then thou begin to take the lowest place with shame. But when thou art invited, go and take the lowest place; that, when he who invited thee cometh, he may say unto thee, Friend, go up higher. Then thou wilt have honor in the presence of those that are at meat with thee. For every one that exalteth himself shall be humbled; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted." Luke xiv. 7—10.

On three different occasions our Lord uttered the words with which this parable is closed. The parable of the Pharisee and Publican is closed in the same manner; and the same words were also used when the Messiah cautioned his disciples against

imitating the arrogance of the Pharisees, who loved the uppermost rooms at feasts, the chief seats in the synagogues, and to be called of men Rabbi, Rabbi. The reason which he gave for the caution was this, "For every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted." We may therefore feel assured that these words contain a lesson of great importance, and that the parable which has been quoted, and so often disregarded, was uttered by our Lord for a higher purpose than merely to teach his disciples a principle of politeness, or how they should conduct at common marriage feasts. More than once he represented the Gospel message as an invitation to a marriage feast, or great supper. Nor can it be doubted that by the parable it was his purpose to teach his disciples a lesson of gospel humility, and to beware of indulging an undue self-esteem in comparing themselves with others. He well knew how prone men are to overrate their own moral worth, and to mistake or undervalue the characters of those who dissent from their views.

This admonitory parable is worthy to be regarded by different sects of Christians, as well as by individuals of the same sect. Those who are well acquainted with the present state of things in our own country must be aware, that persons of more than one sect are eager for the higher places, and assume them with very little ceremony. Nor are there wanting persons who seem disposed to assume the authority of the Master of the Gospel feast, and

to exclude from any place at their Lord's table such as cannot acquiesce in their party creeds. Of the many who claim the higher places, some of them must be disappointed when the King shall come in to view the guests, and assign to each his rank. They cannot all possess the places which they have claimed; and how, on that occasion, will those feel who shall be ordered to "go down lower" and "give place" perhaps to thousands who are now by them despised as unworthy of any place in the family of Christ. In this way will probably be fulfilled or verified another admonitory remark of our Lord:—"Many that are first shall be last, and the last shall be first." Those who are now first in self-esteem have reason to fear and tremble. For every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.

What intelligent and good person does not know that men are very liable to err in estimating their own characters, and in comparing them with the characters of others? And since our Lord has given us such solemn and repeated admonitions on this very subject, is it not surprising that so many of different sects are to be found, who unblushingly assume the higher places; and who practically, if not verbally, say that they are much better than any who dissent from their opinions? If this be not exalting themselves, I know of nothing in human conduct to which the admonitory parable will apply.

Is it not too common to see in the writings of partizans of different sects, not merely rash censures of

the opinions of others, but of the hearts or moral characters of *all* who possess such opinions? Are not similar censures also heard from the pulpit, and seen in the manner in which the people of one denomination treat their brethren of another? How much more of Gospel humility and Christian love would writers and preachers display, if they would kindly endeavor to convince others of their supposed errors in opinion, and leave the judgment of their moral condition to Him who knows the heart, and who has said to his fallible disciples "Judge not"—"Condemn not." Some self-confident persons probably think there can be little danger of their censuring good persons, while they only condemn such as they verily believe to be in error. But let them remember with what daring confidence the scribes and pharisees censured Him whom the Father had sent to be the Saviour of the world.

What well informed Protestant has not been shocked at the confidence with which some Catholics have asserted the doctrine of transubstantiation, and denounced as heretics all who deny that doctrine! But this indiscreet conduct of a Catholic may be a mirror in which many Protestants may see their own dispositions. The Catholic has as good a right to assume the highest place as the Protestant; but neither of them can do it without exposing himself to the dishonor of being publicly told by the Master of the feast to take a lower place. For those who have the better claim to the higher places, are too humble to assume them, or to take them without being ordered so to do.

In extempore speaking men have not always sufficient time for premeditation, and in the heat of their zeal, they are very liable to utter things which will not bear an impartial review, and which are unjustly reproachful to others. But in writing for the pulpit or the press, I think it would be a good rule, after having written, seriously to examine the copy and inquire, whether nothing has been penned which is contrary to the New Commandment, or the Golden Rule—nothing which evinces the disposition to take the highest place, or that must excite the idea that the writer is one of those who "trust in themselves that they are righteous and despise others." In such a review of what has been written, it might be useful for the writer to inquire, how the language and tone he has used would be likely to appear to him, if adopted by a person of another denomination against himself; and then erase whatever he would deem anti-christian and unkind, if used by another in an exchange of circumstances. Should the parable of our Lord be duly regarded in future, in conducting religious Newspapers and other Periodicals, the effects may be happy in relation to the progress of religion, and the peace of the Christian world.

LETTER XIV.

EXAMPLE OF THE FOUR EVANGELISTS.

My Christian Brethren,

SELDOM, if ever, had any ministers of religion greater provocation to use the language of reproach, or more sure ground on which to censure the hearts of fellow-men, than the evangelists had to judge and censure the Scribes and Pharisees, and others who were agents in persecuting the Messiah. In this case there was something more than a diversity of opinion—there were acts of flagrant injustice and abuse. What then was the manner of the evangelists in writing the history of our Lord, and the treatment he received from his persecutors?

In writing their histories, the evangelists had frequent occasion to state the opposition which the Messiah received—the manner in which he was treated—the snares which were laid to entangle him, and the accusations brought against him. Near the close of their history they had occasion to state the conduct of the chief priests, the sanhedrim, and rulers of the people, in hiring Judas to betray him, in employing soldiers to arrest him—their treatment of him while on trial—suborning false-witnesses, their mockings and derisions, their sending him to Pilate to obtain a sentence of crucifixion, their stirring up the people and exciting the clamorous cry—"Crucify him! Crucify him!" They also mention what oc-

curred at the crucifixion—how even the ministers of religion insulted him in his agonies.

Now let it be remembered that all these writers were friends and disciples of Jesus; and two of them his apostles, who had witnessed his ministry, were members of his family, and strongly attached to him as their Lord. It may also be considered how certain it was to them that the character of Jesus was without spot and blameless; that his doctrines and precepts were divine truth, and of the highest importance to mankind. And that all the opposition against him was groundless and unreasonable. Had the evangelists then been influenced by party feelings, we should doubtless have found in their narratives severe reproaches and accusations against the persecutors of the Messiah, and high encomiums of his character and conduct. But in vain do we look into their writings for anything of this kind. In the most simple and artless manner they related such facts as might enable others to judge of the conduct and character of the parties. As became faithful and dispassionate witnesses, they impartially gave their testimony to facts. They neither applaud their Lord, nor reproach his enemies, by expressing their own feelings in favor of him or against them. "The historians," says Dr. Campbell, "speak of nothing, not even the most atrocious actions of our Lord's persecutors with symptoms of emotion—no angry epithet, or pathetic exclamation can escape them—not a word that betrays passion in the writers, or is calculated to excite the passions of the reader."

These facts are remarkable; and, in the purpose

of God, they were probably meant for our good—meant to have a moral influence on the ministers of the Gospel, on ecclesiastical historians, and on all who profess the religion of the Lord Jesus. If ever there was a time when the spirit of resentment, reproach and censure was commendable, such it would seem was the time when the evangelists wrote their histories. But where shall we find four other writers who so perfectly conformed to our Lord's injunctions, "judge not," "condemn not," "Let your yea, be yea, and your nay, nay." It cannot be doubted that the evangelists clearly understood the meaning of these precepts, or prohibitions; and they seem to have been disposed to give an example of obedience to them which would be worthy of imitation. They had learned of him who was meek and lowly, and they exemplified his spirit in their writings.

I cannot but regard it as one of the best evidences that the evangelists wrote under the influence of the divine spirit, that they all so perfectly agree in the manner of their writing, or the temper they displayed in speaking of men who had persecuted their Lord even unto death. They wrote at different times, in different countries, without any pre-concerted plan; yet all under the direction of the same Spirit. Though the writers were *four*, the Spirit was but *one*, and that the most amiable.

Not only were the Evangelists of a forbearing spirit, in speaking of their enemies, but they were frank and unreserved in stating the errors and faults

of their own party. They not only record the conduct of Judas in betraying their Lord, and the conduct of Peter in denying him; but they also record the disputes of the apostles, about which of them should be the prime minister, while they were so in the dark as to suppose that Jesus had come to reign as a temporal prince on the throne of David—how James and John would have called fire from heaven to avenge the unkind treatment given to their Master by the Samaritans; and how they all forsook him and fled, when he was arrested by a band of soldiers.

The conduct of the Evangelists in recording the miscarriages and errors of their own party, has something in it deserving of special notice. It does not appear to have been done to fix reproach on the character of any one, but to furnish an opportunity the more fully to illustrate the forbearing spirit of our Lord towards them, while he knew them to be very imperfect, and in great errors of opinion.

How happy it would have been for the world had all the ministers of the Gospel uniformly displayed the forbearing spirit of our Lord and the four Evangelists! But when we compare many of the writings of ministers of past ages and of the present day with the writings of the Evangelists, how lamentable is the contrast! When the Evangelists had closed their narratives of important facts, they forebore to subjoin any bitter remarks, appeals, or invectives, to excite prejudice against those who had acted as enemies to them or their Lord. This caution appears highly commendable, when we con-

sider that they were writing memoirs of one who was so dear to them, and how naturally it might have been supposed that their minds were strongly pre possessed against his persecutors. How different from this has too often been the conduct of ministers of the Gospel, in speaking of brethren who only dissented from them in opinion! How often, on such ground, have many ventured to censure the hearts of their dissenting brethren, when they might have known themselves to be in such a manner *interested* and prejudiced persons, as would disqualify them for jurors in the opinion of well-informed and impartial men! And not content with this, how many, under such circumstances, have dared to do what they could to excite prejudice in the minds of others against their dissenting brethren! How different from this were the dispositions and the conduct of the four Evangelists!

LETTER XV.

PERNICIOUS EFFECTS OF CENSORIOUS JUDGING.

My Christian Brethren,

As censorious judging has been shown to be as clearly forbidden by the Gospel as theft or mur-

der, it is natural to infer, that it must be pernicious in its effects. Some of which have been incidentally mentioned; but others of them seem to demand more distinct notice.

1. Censorious judging, on account of differences of opinion, tends to divert the attention of people from the law of love as the true standard of Christian character, and to fix it on the creed of the party to which the persons severally belong. Hence instead of regarding the divine precepts as a common standard for all, each party has a standard of its own; and then party love very naturally becomes a substitute for that benevolence which is the fulfilling of the law, and the bond of peace. The consequences of this must be dreadful.

2. The practice tends to prevent the usefulness of those who are censured and defamed. It cannot be reasonably doubted that the censorious conduct of the scribes and pharisees did much to prevent the success of the preaching of even Christ and his apostles. Their slanderous accusations could not fail to prejudice the minds of their adherents against the Saviour and his doctrines. New opinions, or opinions which are regarded as new, are very commonly deemed erroneous and dangerous, whether they be true or false; and their propagators are generally calumniated as wicked men. It was so with Christ and his apostles. The evils of this cruel and mischievous policy have been in some measure counteracted by that law of providence which usually produces in the minds of the consid-

erate a sympathy for the persecuted. Were it not for this, it is difficult to conceive how a reformation of doctrines could ever be effected against the clamor which is so uniformly raised against the teachers of new opinions.

3. The practise of censorious judging also tends to diminish the usefulness of those who indulge themselves in it. For it tends to blind their own eyes, and to turn off their attention from the care of their own hearts—it also sours and embitters their minds, and thus prevents the exhibition of that meek and quiet spirit which is necessary to a person's own usefulness. Their conduct may be applauded by persons of their own disposition; but the truly humble of their own party must be shocked by the contrast between such conduct and the precepts of the Gospel.

4. This odious practice tends to excite and cherish the spirit of war. The war spirit is but the censorious spirit acted out in political conflicts. Hence the person who indulges the censorious spirit must naturally be in a great measure blind to the evils of war and persecution.

5. Censorious judging tends to prevent the progress of light and truth, as well as of love and peace. When new views of any doctrine or of any passage of Scripture are discovered and proposed, it is by no means certain that they are *true*, nor that they are *false*. All improvements or advances are made by new discoveries. True wisdom would dictate that such discoveries should be examined

with impartiality and candor, not hastily received nor rashly rejected. How happy it might have been for myriads of the Jews had they but candidly examined the new doctrines, or new views of religion inculcated by the Messiah! But self-sufficiency blinded the minds of the scribes and pharisees; so they rejected the counsels of God against themselves and led others into the ditch.—People of this age should take warning by their sad example.

6. The practice in question has a pernicious influence on the rising generation. It gives them false views of the nature of true religion. The children of different sects naturally imbibe the *feelings* as well as the *opinions* of their respective parents, and of course grow up with a spirit of hostility towards such as are despised and reproached by their guides. How exceedingly pernicious must have been this practice to the Jewish children in the days of the Messiah! Perhaps stronger prejudices never existed against any Teacher than the unbelieving Jews indulged towards him. The children of course heard him reviled as a Sabbath breaker, a glutton, a drunkard, an impostor and a blasphemer. The common people sometimes "heard him gladly," and they might perhaps generally have done so to their own advantage, had it not been for the slanderous tongues of their religious teachers. But these leading men embittered the minds of their followers against the Messiah, and prepared them to raise the cry—"Crucify him! Crucify him!" It seems in fact that the prejudices thus formed and

transmitted have been *hereditary evils* among the Jews in all quarters of the world for eighteen hundred years. The Jews were indeed driven from their own country and dispersed among the nations; but wherever they went they seem to have carried with them their prejudices against the Messiah and his followers; and their children from age to age have been educated in these prejudices. Similar prejudices have existed between Christians and Mahometans, and between Christians of different sects one towards another. Children in this country—and perhaps in every Christian country, are trained up with prejudices against many good people of different denominations from the one to which they respectively belong; so that these prejudices, like those of the Jews, are likely to be transmitted to unborn generations. As it was among the Jews, so there is reason to believe it is among Christians, that the bitter prejudices which exist between different sects may be principally ascribed to the influence of their teachers. What an awful share of responsibility then is connected with the conduct of such ministers as employ their influence to excite, cherish, and inflame the prejudices of one sect of Christians against another! To reconcile such conduct with the new commandment, or with the prayer of Christ for his disciples, is to me as impossible, as to reconcile with the same standards the political hostilities of Christian nations. A very great portion of the depravity of Christendom at the present time may perhaps be justly ascribed to the anti-christian practice of different sects in reviling one another.

LETTER XVI.

VICES COMPARED.

My Christian Brethren,

WITHIN a few years that species of intemperance which results from the use of strong drink has excited much attention, and called forth commendable exertions for its suppression. By publishing the result of various inquiries respecting the extent to which the vice had prevailed, and its numerous mischiefs, much astonishment was produced. People had not been aware of the extent of these evils; and many became alarmed, and willing to make exertions to stop the flood which threatened to desolate the country.

On further inquiry it may be found, that another species of intemperance prevails in the land to a greater extent than hard drinking; and that its mischiefs are not less to be deplored. Censorious judging is a vice which results from the indulgence of party spirit; and this spirit is not less pernicious than rum or whiskey. By either of them men may become intoxicated even to madness,—and of course prove dangerous and troublesome members of society. Party spirit has often produced such intoxication as to make people believe that they were doing God service by flagrant violations of the law of love. In-

toxication from strong drink, seldom proceeds from hatred to fellow-men; but intoxication from party spirit has the appearance of proceeding from ill will, and on this account is more odious than that which occurs from hard drinking.

That species of intemperance from which censorious judging originates, is not confined to any sect or party, in politics or religion. It is a common and contagious disease—so common that its evils seem to be in a great measure overlooked, except by those who are personally assailed and injured.

Much has been truly said of the numerous broils which occur in families and societies by intemperate drinking. Much of the boxing, duelling, and bloodshed in various forms is accounted for in this way. But do not similar evils occur from party spirit. Besides occasional paroxysms of rage and violence, how often has party intemperance produced long continued agitations in families and communities, and even civil war, and bloody persecutions. To a dreadful extent this species of intoxication prevailed in the times of the Messiah and his apostles. Paul was exceedingly mad with this distemper prior to his conversion—so mad that he verily thought he ought to do many things contrary to Jesus and his humble disciples. In every country where persecution has raged, the mischiefs have originated in party spirit, party intemperance, and censorious judging.

In the political struggles of our country, we have had much evidence of the mischievous effects of party intemperance. In some instances it has seem-

ed as if almost the whole population of the country were in a state of intoxication at the same time. Men of rank and respectability in society have, on such occasions, been too often seen to act like mad men, rather than like themselves, in sober moments. But times of political excitement have not been the only occasions, on which party intemperance has disgraced the American character. What should be said of our religious or anti-religious scenes of party intemperance? How often have the professed disciples of Him who was meek and lowly been so intoxicated by party passions as to feel above all obligations to submit to the precepts of their Lord, in regard to judging one another, and doing to others as they would that others should do unto them? How often have even whole sects been denounced, including thousands of whom the defamer was wholly ignorant, as to their moral characters! Those who have witnessed scenes of intoxication by hard drinking, may have observed how strangely men will talk when their passions are excited by strong drink; how unguarded they often are in their remarks; how bitter in their revilings, and how foolish in their pretended reasonings. Similar things are witnessed in men when intoxicated with party spirit.

The inquiry naturally occurs, Is there no remedy for party intemperance? Must the Christian religion be forever thus disgraced by its professed admirers and votaries. For a time it seemed a hopeless enterprise to attempt a suppression of the other species of intemperance. Soon, however, a hope was exci-

ted that by due exertions many moderate drinkers might be induced to give up their habit before they should pass the bounds of temperance; and that many might be saved from forming the habit of moderate drinking. It was hardly expected that men might be reclaimed who had advanced far in the road of intoxication. Their case was deemed nearly hopeless. It was, however, found that the moderate use of ardent spirits at stated periods, exposed men of become drunkards; that by daily indulgence a thirst was excited which endangered both body and soul, —and that entire abstinence from the use of ardent spirits was the path of safety. Many thousands have become convinced of this, and have adopted the policy,—among whom are an unexpected number of those who were supposed to be past recovery, and bound over by intemperate habits to perish as drunkards. What happy results of a few years exertion!

When all the evils of party intemperance shall have been disclosed, they may be found not less terrific and portentous than the evils of intemperate drinking. Why then shall not Christians of all denominations unite and adopt the same saving policy for both species of intemperance—and resolve on total abstinence from party spirit as well as from liquid fire? Should this policy be cordially and universally, or even generally adopted, it is believed that immense advantages would speedily result to the cause of religion, as well as to individual and social happiness. There is perhaps no case in reference to which it may be more safely said, "the tongue is a fire, a

world of iniquity; it setteth on fire the course of nature, and is set on fire of hell," than when it is employed in censorious judging, under the control of party passions. By due obedience to the new commandment, the work of thorough reformation would be effected. This would imply total abstinence from party spirit, the great source of mischief among Christians. For it was not party affection that Christ exercised towards his disciples, but pure, impartial, and forbearing love. This had been the source of all his conduct towards them when he said—"This is my commandment, that ye love one another as I have loved you." With the same love he prayed for all his disciples, that they all might be one even as he and the Father are one. To this precept and this prayer let the heart and tongue of every Christian say, Amen.—Such a revival of religion would diffuse joy throughout heaven and earth.

LETTER XVII.

THE GOSPEL REMEDY FOR CONTENTION.

My Christian Brethren,

It would be useless to investigate the causes of a malady and display its evils, if God had failed to

provide a remedy. What has been said in preceding letters may seem to have anticipated the purpose of the present; but the importance of the subject may justify further attempt for elucidation.

Admitting the correctness of Solomon's maxim—"Only by pride cometh contention," we may naturally infer that humility is both a preventive and a remedy—a preventive if adopted in season, and a remedy if duly applied after the disease has occurred.

The first contention among the professed disciples of the Messiah, of which we have any account, occurred among the Twelve, whom he had selected for apostles—on the question, "who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?"—Or as Luke more definitely states the case, "There was a strife among them which of *them* should be the greatest." What but pride could have originated this contention? What but humility was wanting to have prevented it? And what but humility could be a proper remedy after the strife had occurred? This was in fact the remedy prescribed by the great Physician. As was observed in a preceding letter, the first time Christ discoursed with the Twelve concerning their strife, "He called a little child and set him in the midst of them and said, Verily I say unto you, except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever, therefore, shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven." Matt. xviii. 2, 3, 4. Mark and Luke have recorded

some observations made by our Lord, which were omitted by Matthew. "If any man desire to be first of all, the same shall be last of all." Mark ix. 35. "For he that is *least* among you all, the same shall be *great*." Luke ix. 48.

Notwithstanding the admonition thus given, Jesus had further occasion to interpose his authority and instructions, to check the ambition of his disciples, and put an end to their strife. It appears to have been, after what has been related that James and John had the confidence to request the two higher offices, or to say to him "Grant unto us that we may sit one on thy right hand, and the other on thy left, in thy glory." It is evident that the other disciples were present when Jesus replied to this request; and what followed his reply I shall state according to the translation of Dr. Campbell.

"The ten having heard this conceived indignation against James and John. But Jesus having called them together, said to them—"Ye know that those who are accounted princes of the nations domineer over them, and their great ones exercise authority upon them; but it must not be so among you. On the contrary, whosoever would be *great* among you shall be your servant; and whosoever would be *chief* of all shall be the *slave* of all. For even the Son of man came not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many." Mark x. 41—45.

Luke has reported the words of Christ in a different form, but in a manner forcible and impressive:

"The kings of the nations exercise dominion over them, and they who oppress them are styled benefactors. But with you it must be otherwise. Nay, let the greatest among you be as the smaller; and him who governeth as he who serveth. For whether is greater he who is at table or he who serveth? Is not he that sitteth at table? Yet I am among you as one that serveth." Luke xxii. 25—28.

The discourses of Christ on these occasions were illustrative of the principle which he so repeatedly announced, "Whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he who humbleth himself shall be exalted." It seems to have been his purpose to lay the axe at the root of the tree of contention, by teaching that greatness or dignity in his kingdom was not to be estimated according to worldly maxims or principles,—not by the amount of wealth which a person may amass, nor by the splendor of his talents or acquirements, nor by the height of his official station; but that in God's esteem, a man is "great" in proportion as he possesses a humble and benevolent mind—a disposition to do or to suffer whatever may be necessary to the good of others—a disposition "not to be served, but to serve." Hence his own example was proposed for their imitation. A similar lesson was taught the apostles the evening before the crucifixion, when Jesus washed their feet.

The disposition of mind which was thus made the standard of dignity or greatness is the spirit of obedience. Hence, in the sermon on the mount, Jesus said, "Whosoever, therefore, shall break one of these

least commandments," or even the least of these commandments, "and shall teach men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven;" but whosoever shall *do* and *teach* them shall be called *great* in the kingdom of heaven." Matt. v. 19. On the same principle he also said "Love your enemies, and do good and lend, hoping for nothing again, and your reward shall be *great*, and ye shall be called the CHILDREN OF THE HIGHEST; for He is good unto the unthankful and to the evil. Luke vii. 35. The same disposition is by Paul denominated love or charity. 1 Cor. xiii, which he says "suffereth long and is kind—envieth not—vaunteth not itself—is not puffed up—doth not behave itself unseemly—seeketh not her own." This, too, is what James calls the "wisdom that is from above, which is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy;" and this he mentions in contrast with that diabolical wisdom whence cometh envying, strife, confusion and every evil work." See James iii. 14—17.

Possessing in perfection the humble, peaceable and benevolent temper, "the Son of man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many?" In view of this glorious example, John says, "we ought also to lay down our lives for the brethren." The meaning is supposed to be this, that Christians should possess the same disposition that was displayed by Christ, and be ready to do or to suffer whatever may be necessary for the happiness of others, or the good of the Messiah's kingdom.

Here I may ask, what can be more obvious than that the humble and benevolent temper required and exemplified by the Saviour, is totally incompatible with that bitterness, reviling and contention which is so frequently manifested by different sects of Christians one towards the other? Let the principle of spiritual dignity be duly esteemed—let Christians know and feel that he only "who humbleth himself shall be exalted," and let the meek and benevolent spirit of the Messiah be manifested by the people of the several sects in their treatment of each other; then it will be seen that the spirit of the Gospel is a remedy for those contentions which have so long been a reproach to Christians, and a stumbling block to unbelievers. Water is no better adapted to extinguish material fire than humility is to put out the fires of contention among brethren. But all liquids are not adapted to quench fire. Brandy, if poured on ever so abundantly, would increase the flame. In like manner party spirit—which too frequently passes for religion, only serves to increase the flames of strife, and to destroy the happiness of society.

Humility disposes a person to be jealous of himself, and to observe his own imperfections. The humble man will naturally discover many defects in himself, which are not visible to others, and which perhaps he cannot see in them. Hence it will be an object of his care "not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think," and to be one of the number of Christians who comply with another of

Paul's exhortations:—"Doing nothing through contention or vain glory; but in humility of mind esteeming others better than yourselves." Philippians ii. 5. Newcombe's translation.

Humility is not only meek but benevolent and forgiving. It seeks to "overcome evil with good." Hence it is certain, that the more there is of humility among Christians, the less there will be of contention. Many of the contentions among Christians are occasioned by that unruly evil the tongue "which setteth on fire the course of nature, and is set on fire of hell." Now what can be named short of death or paralysis, which is more sure to restrain the tongue from sarcasm and evil speaking, than humility of mind? The more humble a man is the more conscious he is of his own liability to errors of the understanding and of the heart; and this consciousness united with benevolence will dispose him to be candid towards others, and to do unto them as he would that they should do unto him. To illustrate the nature of humility, I will state a supposable case.

In a time of great excitement and party strife, a minister sits down to write a sermon in vindication of some disputed doctrine, which he believes to be of great importance. But having failed to call humility to his aid, he writes under the influence of party passions. As he proceeds, he grows warmer and warmer, with feelings of contempt or resentment towards all who have opposed his doctrine. He is not contented with producing arguments in its favor;

he must give vent to his passions against dissenters. He boldly accuses them of gross errors in their interpretations of the Scriptures; and imputes these errors to the wickedness of their hearts; and fails not to reproach them either as *heretics* or as *bigots*. Thus, while he wantonly calumniates others as destitute of the gospel temper, he evinces a deplorable defect in his own heart. But prior to the time for delivering his discourse, some affecting event of providence occurs that calls him to deep reflection, occasions a favorable change of feeling, gives humility leave to rise and speak for herself. Hence occurs the following soliloquy:—

'What have I written for a sermon to be delivered by myself, as the ambassador of Him who was "meek and lowly of heart?" He exercised forbearance towards his erring Apostles, during the whole course of his ministry, though he knew them to be in gross errors of opinion; yet I have reproached hundreds of his professed disciples as his enemies; and have said much to excite against them the contempt of others. But why all this rashness? They indeed differ from me in their interpretations of some passages of Scripture; but if this be a good reason for me to be offended with them, why may not they as justly be offended with me? Are not some of them at least possessed of as good talents as myself? May they not have had as good advantages for acquiring knowledge? and how do I know that they have been less honest and impartial in their inquiries than I have been in mine? How has it happened that I have

been so forward to *accuse* them, and yet so backward in regard to *suspecting* myself? Could this be the work of humility or benevolence? Have I done to others as I would that they should do to me? Even taking it for granted that they are bad men, is my sermon adapted to do them or any body else any good? Will it not give far more proof of wrong in me than of wrong in them? I indeed have *accused them;* but I have done it with a temper which is the reverse of what is required in the gospel of every disciple of Christ. I will therefore revise the sermon, and erase every word which shall appear to me inconsistent with that love which worketh no evil to its neighbor.'

Such I think would be the natural operations of humility, if allowed to speak in the supposed case; and this illustration is capable of being applied in a great variety of different circumstances. If Christians would but listen to the dictates of humility, instead of the suggestions of self-esteem and party passions, it is very certain that most of the occasions of strife would be avoided—a more salutary character would be given not only to sermons, but to conversations, and to the various publications on religious subjects. Should the tongue and the pen be duly subjected to the control of such a disposition as induced "even the Son of Man to come not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many," it might soon be found a possible thing for men of different opinions to be united in affection, and to love one another with a pure heart fervently.

The tender affection which existed between Jesus and his Apostles, while they differed so greatly in opinion on some important subjects, is a proof that unity of opinion is not essential to mutual affection. He indeed had occasion to reprove his apostles for their ambition and contention; but he did it in such meekness and love that it occasioned no alienation. Though he well knew their errors of opinion, he did not go about the country denouncing or reproaching them, either as *heretics* or as *bigots*. Notwithstanding all their imperfections Jesus loved them to the end of his ministry; and never perhaps did he evince towards them more sincere and tender affection than in his last interview with them, and in his prayer for them, prior to the crucifixion. In what way then can Christians of the present age better evince love to Christ, than by imitating this benignant and forbearing example, and by obeying his commandment, "Love one another as I have loved you?" However high may be our opinion of his *natural dignity*, or however confident and loud we may be in asserting that opinion, this will not insure his approbation. He was "meek and lowly of heart," and it was his "meat and drink" to do his Father's will. If the same mind is in us that was in him, we shall be acknowledged as his friends and disciples indeed. Without this we shall be found wanting. For thus saith our Lord and Judge—"Not every one that saith unto me Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that *doeth the will of my Father who is in heaven.*"

LETTER XVIII.

CONCLUSION.

My Christian Brethren,

In preceding letters I have attempted to unveil some of the causes and evils of contention among Christians, that they may be seen in a true light. It has been my aim to write with friendly feelings towards my brethren of all denominations,—and to express my views in a dispassionate and inoffensive manner. But if in this I have failed, or should it be thought that I have misinterpreted some passages of scripture, still I hope that my readers will not regard my faults as an excuse for omitting a thorough examination of the subject for themselves. For however imperfect my efforts may have been, the subject is unquestionably of great practical importance. It is my belief that duelling can be as easily vindicated on Gospel principles, as the mutual revilings of Christians of different opinions. So far as any of my writings may have evinced an unkind or a censorious spirit, I would humbly implore the forgiveness of God, and the forgiveness of all my fellow Christians who have been injured by my remarks, or misled by my example. I have doubtless often erred in the opinions I have expressed, while I verily believed them to be correct. As an excuse for such errors I may plead the fallibility of my understanding, or the want

of means to obtain correct views. For my conscience bears me witness, that truth has been the object of my inquiries, and that I have never intentionally published erroneous opinions. But if I have indulged bitter or unchristian feelings towards any of my brethren, for these I have no excuse to make; but must plead guilty, and supplicate for pardoning mercy.

Of the Turks it has been said—"Their religion inspires them with contempt and hatred for those of another creed." It is to be feared that this may be said of too many who bear the name of Christians; but if so, it is "*their* religion"—not the religion taught by Jesus Christ, which bears such bitter fruit. His religion, like the Father from whom it descended, seeks the good of all. It is that "wisdom" from above, which is "full of mercy and good fruits." When I compare with this the wisdom which is frequently displayed in sectarian strife, the contrast is shocking; and I seem to see a cause for the prevalence of Deism in the most favored countries of Christendom. If by any means I should be made to believe that the Christian religion has authorized the unkind and censorious spirit which has so often agitated society, I should either doubt its divine origin, or relinquish the idea that "God is love." But when I perceive that all party bitterness and reviling are forbidden by the Gospel, and are the reverse of what its precepts enjoin, my faith in the divine origin of this religion is really strengthened by observing the deplorable contrast. For it then seems unquestion-

able that a religion so pure, so peaceable, so forgiving, and so benignant, must have descended from above; that it could not have been invented by such beings as men have been in all past ages. Indeed the *character* of the Christian religion seems to me one of the best proofs that there is a God; that he is wise and good; and that he has made to men a revelation of his character and his will.

To some persons it may be gratifying to know that the views I have expressed in this series of letters on the evil and danger of ascribing error of opinion to wickedness of heart, are not the effect of recent changes in my own mind. When I was a Trinitarian, and nearly forty years ago, I published similar views of that principle in what I then wrote to the late Dr. Baldwin, on the subject of "Close Communion." Very soon after I entered on the work of the ministry, I became dissatisfied with the practice of referring all error of opinion on religious subjects to a criminal source; and also with the practice of reproaching whole sects of Christians as destitute of piety, on the ground of their alleged erroneous opinions. The more I have reflected on the subject since that period, the more I have been convinced of the injustice and the danger of such practices. The more too I have been convinced that such practices imply a deplorable want of humility in those who adopt them, and an astonishing degree of blindness in regard to their own liability to err.

Some of the views however, which are contained in these letters respecting the principle of dignity

established by the Messiah—his example in his treatment of his erring and contending apostles, and his New Commandment, are of more recent origin in my own mind. I cannot but wonder that they did not occur to me at an earlier period of my inquiries. If these views are correct, it is surely of vast importance that they should be diffused, clearly understood, and reduced to practice by Christians of every name. Should Christians generally, adopt the principle of spiritual dignity, as stated by our Lord, and conform to his New Commandment in their treatment of each other while of different opinions, there will be further occasion to adopt the animating language of David—"Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!" The due observance of that one principle, and one command would exclude from Christendom all national hostilities—all persecution and sectarian strife, and fill every Christian country with the blessed fruits of love, peace, and joy. Nor is this all; the benign influence would be continually extending the boundaries of Christendom till it should embrace all the nations of the earth. Then too would be seen a cheerful compliance in every land with Paul's exhortation to the Colossians;—

"But now do ye put off all these, anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth. Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds; and have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him; where there is

neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian nor Scythian, bond nor free; but Christ is all and in all. Put on therefore as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering; forbearing one another, and forgiving one another. If any man have a quarrel against any, even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye. And above all things, put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness;—and let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also ye are called in one body,—and be ye thankful." Col. iii. 8—15.

Such a reformation as would result from due conformity to this exhortation, might remove every doubt as to the divine origin of the Christian religion, or its adaptedness to promote the happiness of mankind, both in this world, and in the world to come. To show the necessity and importance of such a reformation, has been a principal object in writing this series of letters, which is now to be closed. The more there is in Christians of different sects a disposition to contend about "which of them is the greatest," the more they need to be changed and reformed. I what I have written should on y be the means of exciting in myself and a few of my brethren a more due consideration of what Christ said to his apostles when he saw them thus contending, my labors will not have been in vain; and that these letters may be of use to myself, as well as to others, is the ardent desire of your ffectionate brother.

April, 1831. NOAH WORCESTER.

POSTSCRIPT.

As a proof that I have not been alone in my views of the present state of Christians, I subjoin the following passage from the writings of the late celebrated Robert Hall. The extract is from the first paragraph of what he wrote "On the Terms of Communion."

"To see Christian societies regarding each other with the jealousies of rival empires, each aiming to raise itself on the ruin of all others, making extravagant boasts of superior purity, generally in exact proportion to their departure from it, and scarcely deigning to acknowledge the possibility of obtaining salvation out of their pale, is the odious and disgusting spectacle which modern Christianity presents. The bond of charity, which unites the genuine followers of Christ in distinction from the world is dissolved; and the very terms, by which it was wont to be denoted, exclusively employed to express a predilection for a sect. The evils which result from this state of division are incalculable. It supplies infidels with their most plausible topics of invective. It hardens the consciences of the irreligious, weakens the hands of the good, impedes the efficacy of prayer, and is probably the principal obstruction to that ample effusion of the Spirit which is essential to the renovation of the world."

After the whole series of Letters to Christians had been prepared for the press, I opened the first volume of Mr. Hall's writings, and my attention was soon attracted by the passage which has now been copied. It struck my mind as a remarkable

epitome of what I had written. The first sentence, however, seemed to contain more of severity than I had allowed myself to express. But if it be a truth that rival sects are chargeable with "making extravagant boasts of superior purity, generally in exact proportion to their departure from it," what can be of greater importance to them than that this truth should be understood? A due consideration of the nature of humility, as contrasted with pride, will perhaps justify the sentiment expressed by Mr. Hall; and in this manner, though dead, he now speaks to the Christian world. May his admirers of every sect duly hearken to his admonitory voice, and exert themselves to correct the evils of which he complained. In proportion as Christians shall possess the true spirit of the Gospel, they must desire to see a reformation of such lamentable evils and inconsistencies.

Perhaps there are few persons of any sect of Christians who will object to the foregoing letters, if they can make themselves believe that the remarks which imply blame were meant to be applied only to such as dissent from their creed; yet many may be displeased, from an apprehension that inconsistency has been intentionally imputed to themselves or their party. Let it then be observed, that I have written the letters in the belief that there are errors—both of opinion and practice, in all the denominations of Christians with which I am acquainted; and in the hope that there are good people in each sect, who will deplore the existing evils, and exert their influence to effect a reformation. N. W.

Acme
Bookbinding Co., Inc.
100 Cambridge St.
Charlestown, MA 02129

3 2044 048 276 380